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# **T H E   D I L E M M A**

*ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE*

# THE DILEMMA

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'THE BATTLE OF DORKING'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



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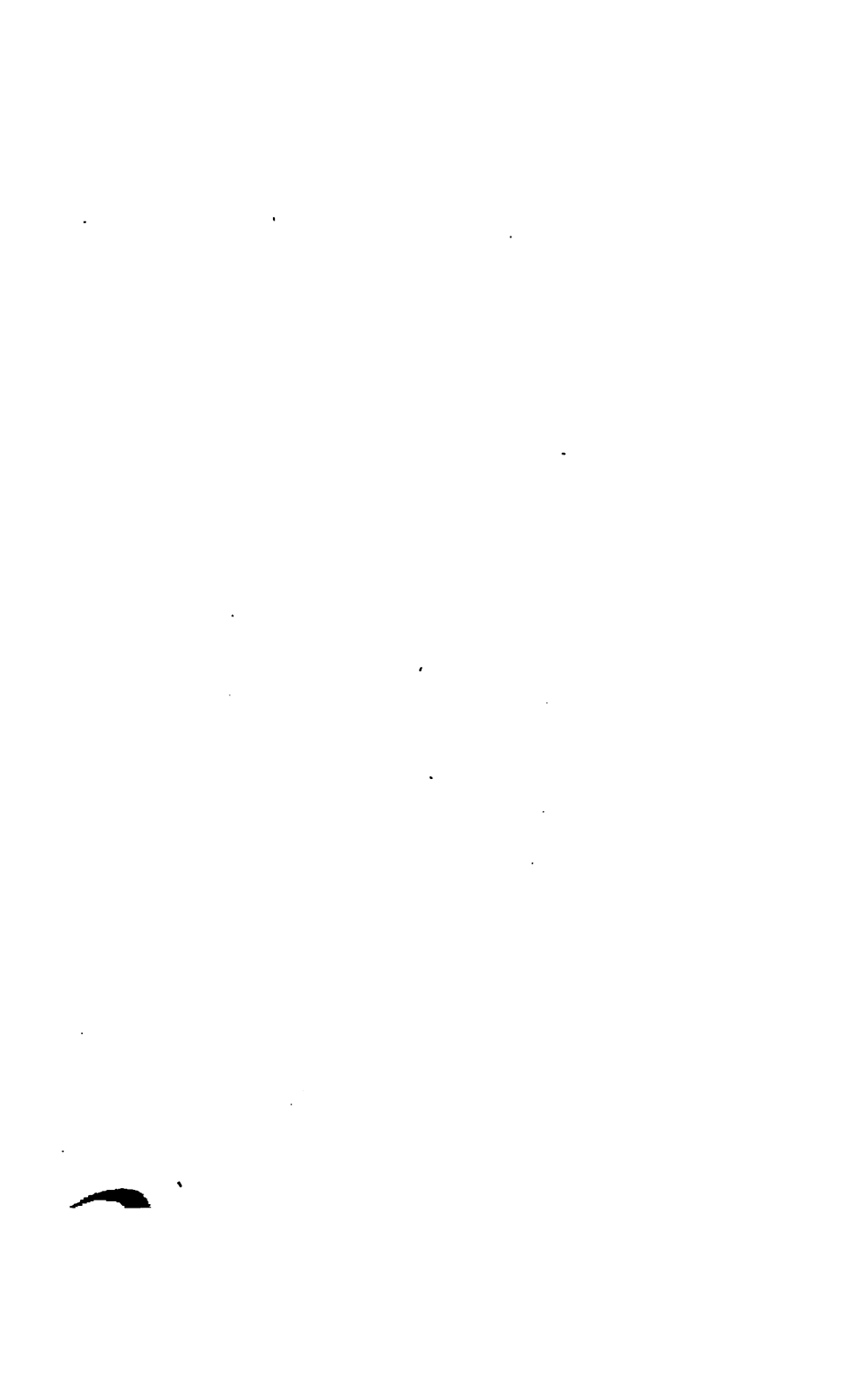
# THE DILEMMA.



## CHAPTER I.

WITH the advent of the cold season Anglo-Indian society revives from its hot-weather torpor. Drills and field-days begin ; regiments are on the move ; civilians look up their camp equipage and shooting apparatus ; officers rejoin from furlough ; wives and children return from the hills ; inspections, balls, and race-meetings come off. At the beginning of the cold season, too, there takes place the annual importation of young ladies from England. At small stations, indeed, this last element of the cold-weather excitement must needs be of a more or less intermittent and occasional character, since there will not be found every year parents to receive a newly grown-up daughter ;





# THE DILEMMA

able and well-informed. But I am afraid it will be slow for her out here, for my worthy chief, though a very excellent fellow, ain't much accustomed to ladies' society, and she's not the sort of girl to care for what you fellows call gaiety—a ball where you make up a dozen dancing couples, including the grandmamas still on active service; or your pic-nics out at the Nawab's gardens, where there's no grass and no water, and nothing to do but yawn, and eat hermetically-sealed lobsters. No, no, English life spoils you for that sort of thing. I declare since I have come back from furlough I hate India more than ever."

So saying, Captain Sparrow mounted his horse, and, nodding his adieu languidly but affably to his audience, cantered off to the Residency, while the little group of officers dispersed to their respective bungalows to dress and breakfast. Nor were they the only persons discussing the subject. "The poor dear commissioner," said Mrs Polwheedle, the brigadier's wife, to the occupant of the next carriage, as the two ladies sat listening to the strains of the regimental band playing on the Mall at sunset—"the poor dear commissioner, there's his daughter actually

going to arrive in a day or two, and not a thing ready for her. I want him to let Miss Cunningham stay with us for a week or two at first, it will be so dull for her, poor girl, in that great barn of a Residency all by herself, and not a lady within five miles. No, he has not exactly promised that she shall do so, but then you know the commissioner, it is so hard to get him to say a thing outright; he is always most friendly with us, I am sure, and the brigadier says he is very clever in his management of the natives, and very clever he must be, for he scarcely ever speaks a word. But as I said to him, my dear Mr Cunningham, you really must let the dear girl stay and rest with us, at any rate on her way up, for she will be shaken to death with the palkee journey from Panipoor, and will never be able to get on to the Residency the same morning. And so we expect her, and then I daresay when she once stops, she will be glad to stay with me for a day or two, and the commissioner can come down and dine whenever he likes, and I will ask some of the senior officers and their wives to meet them. This will be such a nice introduction for her—don't you think so? and much pleasanter than

if she were set down all at once at the Residency, with the commissioner away all day at cutchery, and she not able to speak a word of the language. It's bad enough when you can talk it, with these native servants ready to steal the very nose off your face. Oh, I do think they are such rogues, every man of them." And, as the good lady's thoughts passed from her hospitable intentions to the wrongs inflicted by the children of the soil, her ample face assumed a rosier hue, and her voice a deeper tone.

The arrangement proposed by Mrs Polwheedle for Miss Cunningham's reception was, however, never carried out. Two mornings after the above conversation took place, the brigadier, returning from his early ride, brought the news to his wife that the commissioner had gone down the previous day in the Nawab's camel-carriage to Panipoor, at which place he made road from Calcutta at that time terminated, to meet his daughter and her maid, and that the party had passed through cantonments on their way to the Residency at daybreak that morning.

## CHAPTER II.

MUSTAPHABAD society allowed Miss Cunningham one day's rest to recover from the fatigue of her journey, and by way of preserving its own self-respect from the imputation of curiosity—the only exception being Captain Buxey the paymaster, who as an old friend who had known her when she was a little girl, drove out to see her the very first day ; but on the second morning after her arrival quite a stream of visitors might have been seen making their way along the dusty road between the cantonments and the Residency, with many of whom, to the desire of seeing the fair occupant, was added a curiosity to inspect the place by daylight ; for the commissioner, although a hospitable man, who gave frequent solemn dinner-parties as became his position, was too much occupied with business to receive morning visitors while living alone.

First in the field was Mrs Polwheedle, whose barouche drove into the Residency grounds even before the gong in the portico had struck eleven o'clock, the time when etiquette assumes that visitors should be only starting from their own houses, and early enough to find Mr Cunningham still sitting with his daughter over a late breakfast-table. "I thought I would come early," said the lady, after greetings, "because I know your papa has to be in court all day; and as he wouldn't let you stop with us on the way, as I wanted him to, I thought it might be a comfort to you to have some one to introduce all the visitors when they arrive; for you will have quite a levee to-day—the whole station in fact. It's not quite the same thing, of course, as when we arrived, when the brigadier came to take up the command; then there was a salute fired, and all the officers came to call in uniform and swords; still, I can assure you, your arrival has made quite a sensation, as well it may," she added, taking a step backward, and surveying, with her head on one side, the beautiful young woman before her, who stood smiling and amused at the address of her voluble visitor. "My dear, you must let me give you a kiss," continued Mrs Polwheedle, ad-

vancing as she spoke, and folding Miss Cunningham in her ample embrace ; “ I am sure that we shall be great friends. I have no daughter of my own—only one son ; I will tell you all about him by - and - by,” she added, with a knowing smile. “ Then you will want some hints about the servants, for they will take you in nicely at first. Oh yes,” she continued, stopping Mr Cunningham short as he was about to speak, “ I know the dear good commissioner thinks they are quite perfect angels with black faces,—just like the brigadier, in fact—he believes in the natives too ; and nicely he would be robbed if it wasn’t for me ; I don’t believe his bearer would leave him a shirt to his back. And then you will be wanting some advice about furniture,” she continued, as the two ladies moved towards the drawing-room — for the commissioner, unable to come into action under fire of the invader’s guns, had effected a retreat into his own rooms—“ and very difficult it is, to get furniture so far up country ; but, bless me ! ” she exclaimed, as the altered aspect of the great room broke on her, its former empty condition having been remedied by the advent of a large assortment of tables, couches, easy-chairs, and ottomans, comfortable but in-



congruous, which the sly commissioner had managed to introduce without her agency or knowledge, the whole set off by a brand-new grand piano, arrived a day or two before its mistress—"bless me! why, this is indeed a transformation!" nor was the lady's astonishment diminished on finding that Miss Cunningham was till then unaware that all this splendour had been accumulated entirely on her account. "Why, I declare, my dear, one hardly knows the place again. Your papa used to give very elegant dinners, you know, as became his position; half the station would be here at a time, and everything in first-rate style. You can do the thing properly in these splendid rooms—Calcutta matting, too, I declare!" she ejaculated, by way of interlude, poking the floor with her parasol; "must have cost a rupee a-yard if it cost a pice. Splendid rooms, are they not? and no rent to pay. I often tell the brigadier he ought to write in to Government for an official residence. Our dining-room will only hold eighteen comfortably, though you can get twenty-two in by a squeeze. We must make the commissioner fix an early day to bring you to dinner,—a sort of introduction to Mustaphabad society; but, as I was saying, al-

though the commissioner used to give such fine parties, when the ladies came into the drawing-room there was hardly a chair for them to sit down upon, leave alone an ottoman. And now I declare," she added, surveying the room with a comprehensive glance, "I don't suppose there is a house outside Chowringhee so handsomely furnished. And the whole effect is really quite chaste; the mixture of green and blue satin blends so nicely, doesn't it? But, dear me, I have never asked you about yourself all this time! Tell me, my dear, you must have had an awfully trying journey. For my part, I never will go even to the hills unless the brigadier goes with me; I really cannot travel alone. For all that I look so strong, I am really very delicate, and the least fright upsets me. Tell me, my dear, weren't you very nervous at first starting on your journey at being surrounded by chattering natives, and you not able to speak a word to them?"

"Oh no," replied the young lady, smiling; "you see we came—that is, my companion and I—with friends of papa almost the whole way. So we had no trouble at all; and then papa sent his head man—his jemadar I think he calls him

—to Calcutta to meet me, and he sat on the box night and day, and seemed never to go to sleep at all ; so we got on capitally, and then papa met us at Panipoor, and brought us on in a camel-carriage, a wonderful conveyance, but really very comfortable.”

Thus Mrs Polwheedle was already established on a friendly footing when the other visitors arrived, a succession of them too numerous to mention, ladies with their husbands, and bachelors, singly or in pairs—Colonel Tartar of the Hussars, to wit, driving his mail-phæton ; Rowell and Scurry of the same regiment driving out together in the latter’s tandem ; Messrs Cubitt and Stride of the Artillery, in a buggy hired from Nubbee Bux, general dealer in the bazaar, the horse attached to which being newly employed in such a capacity made sundry diversions by the way off the road, happily unattended with serious consequences, as the embankment was not much raised above the surrounding country. Others, more economically disposed, made the journey on horseback, among them Lieutenant Yorke and Ensign Spragge of the 76th Native Infantry, who cantered down to the Residency on their respective ponies.

The commissioner's house—which had been built in the days before the annexation of Mustaphabad, and when British authority and interest had been represented by a resident or diplomatic agent stationed at the Court of the Nawab, and therefore still bore the designation of the “Residency”—had been designed with a view to symbolise the importance of the paramount authority—the reigning Nawab under treaty engagements paying the cost—and the architect had apparently intended to produce some undefined resemblance to the British Museum or a Grecian temple, without feeling quite sure which of the two should be copied. The two visitors, riding through a gateless opening in the wall which enclosed the spacious grounds, alighted under a gigantic portico of no particular order, the columns of which dwarfed their ponies to the size of sheep, and where a sepoy of their regiment was standing as sentry; and then, proceeding up a flight of broad steps, on which were lounging half-a-dozen messengers clad in scarlet tunics, with gold waistbands and white turbans, were ushered into the house. The public rooms were large and lofty; but the drawing-room, which occupied the centre of the building, de-

iving all its light from narrow clerestory windows shaded by blinds, and through the doors opening into the surrounding rooms, was somewhat gloomy in the daytime. Not, however, that young Yorke noticed these particulars at the time; for, entering straightway from the glare of Indian sunlight into comparative darkness, he was painfully conscious of making an entry deficient in dignity, as he stumbled against an ottoman, and then knocked his shins against a chair, before he became gradually able to make out the presence of the occupants of the drawing-room, Miss Cunningham, Mrs Polwheedle, and two officers of Hussars; and as the new-comers established themselves on chairs at the far side of a great gulf or open space, bounded on one side by a table, and on the other by a large ottoman, our subaltern became more than ever impressed with a sense of his unworthiness, while feeling, too, that his tight red shell-jacket contrasted disadvantageously with the easy grace of the long braided frock-coats of the other visitors. Moreover, although the latter had driven over, they were adorned with long glistening steel spurs, whereas the two infantry subalterns wore little insignificant appendages screwed into the heels of

their boots, as befitted men of their branch of the service when on horseback, wholly without lustre or rattle, and good only for use. The road too had been dusty, and the wind high, and even a December sun is hot at mid-day, and poor Yorke was conscious that his face was flushed and dirty, contrasting unfavourably with the cool and orderly appearance of the two drivers, one of whom sat calmly sucking the top of his cane, while the other, with a pleased simper on his face, and playing with his laced cap, was talking easy nothings to the lady of the house.

Nor did the conversation begin auspiciously. It was opened by Mrs Polwheedle.

“You young gentlemen rode over on your tats, I suppose? The subaltern’s tat, my dear Miss Cunningham—that is the name, you know, they give to a pony in this country—is the most useful animal you can imagine. It goes out any number of times a day, and does any quantity of work, and never gets tired. Every subaltern, you know, in this country keeps his pony, although how an ensign can afford to do it on his pay is a perfect wonder, with grain at sixteen pounds the rupee.”

Poor Yorke felt himself getting redder than

ever ; but while casting about for a repartee which did not readily present itself, one of the hussar officers took up the cudgels.

"Subalterns don't always keep ponies, if you please, Mrs Polwheedle ; I have never had one since I entered the service : I prefer horses ; so does Mr Scurry here."

"Oh yes, of course," replied Mrs Polwheedle, with a smile, as if half disposed to wrath, half disposed to condescension ; "I was not referring to cavalry officers ; you gentlemen have your chargers, I know, and very pretty they look, but——"

"By the way," interrupted the aggressive Rowell, "that's not a bad-looking tat the brigadier has been riding lately—where did he get him from ?"

"You mean his grey horse ?" replied the lady, bridling up.

"Well, it isn't exactly a horse," continued the persistent Rowell ; "it certainly ain't fourteen ; I doubt if it's much over thirteen."

"Well, sir, and if it is not, pray what has the age of the horse to do with the matter ?"

"Not thirteen years, Mrs Polwheedle ; I wasn't speaking about the pony's age, but about

his height. However," he continued, seeing that the lady appeared to have had enough in the encounter, "it looks a good, useful, weight-carrying nag, and handy for getting off and on again—not far to travel either way."

This last remark might be said to complete the victory, for riding was not among Brigadier Polwheedle's strong points; but the lady was not prepared to surrender all at once the position she had assumed, so, turning again towards young Spragge, she said—

"So you have got a new commanding officer now—Major Dumble. He called on us yesterday, and seems a quiet, gentlemanly person. How do you like the change from Colonel Marshall?"

"Well, of course, we are sorry to lose our dear old colonel; he had never been away from the regiment before."

"And why did he leave it to go to another regiment, then?"

"He had to make way for Major Dumble. The major, of course, had to come back to the regiment on promotion, because he couldn't hold his appointment as a field-officer; and as he must come back to his own regiment, the colonel had to be shifted to another."



"Oh yes; the brigadier was telling me something about it. Major Dumble comes from the commissariat, does he not?"

"No, from the pay department; he has been fifteen years away from the regiment."

"Well, I hope he is a good drill, and will take care to get the regiment into good order for inspection, for the brigadier is very particular. You must know, Miss Cunningham, that all the annual inspections are coming on. The brigadier has to inspect all the regiments in the station, and make a report on them to the commander-in-chief; this is a first-class brigade, you know, and so the brigadier reports direct to headquarters. You will enjoy these inspections, I am sure, and must not fail to come to them, especially the cavalry review, it is such a pretty sight. Isn't it, Mr Rowell?" she added, turning towards that gentleman, and as it were holding out the olive-branch to him.

"Oh yes," replied Rowell; "the colonel generally knocks the regiment about a bit on these occasions—pursuing practice, and that sort of thing; it amuses the brigadier and the ladies."

Just then Miss Cunningham, opposite to whom Yorke was sitting, but a long way off, crossed

over towards him. If she seemed beautiful before, the grace of her movements as she passed over the open space possessed the young fellow as with a sense of enchantment; while the rustling of her dress when she took the seat next to his raised a corresponding flutter in his heart, as he sat motionless, fascinated by her proximity, hardly venturing to look up, gazing at the folds of rich trimmings that fluttered beside him.

Yet there was nothing very formidable in her opening address. "These soldiers," she asked, "who mount guard by turns at our door, do they belong to your regiment?"

As Miss Cunningham said this in a low rich voice, which had in it an expression of unconscious pathos, and turning her long graceful neck, looked towards the listener, her manner was as if the question was full of interest for her, and her face, although it wore an open smile, seemed as one that might be readily attuned to sympathy with sorrow.

Yorke's acquaintance with young ladies was not large, and he had never met with anything like this before. Miss Glumme, one of the two young ladies imported into Mustaphabad in the

previous season, never looked you in the face at all, but answered questions monosyllabically, and with downcast eyes, as if conversation was a thing unbecoming a woman ; Miss Peart, on the other hand, a little brunette nowise afflicted with *mauvais honte*, jerked out her sentences with a sort of little laugh at the end of each, as if the mere act of saying anything in itself partook of the funny. But here was a young lady who appeared even when in society to take an interest in something. A queen, too, could not have been more gracious ; and surely no queen ever looked more regal in her crown than did this beautiful young woman with a coronet of rich brown hair braided over her lofty head.

It was a simple question, but Yorke felt himself growing redder than ever, as he replied in the affirmative.

"I quite expected," continued Miss Cunningham, "to find the sepoys insignificant-looking creatures, with large soft eyes and big earrings. It was quite a surprise to see them so different. You must feel very proud of commanding such fine fellows."

"I don't command them, you know," replied Yorke ; "I only command my own company—

at least I hold two companies just now, as we are short of officers"—here the young fellow stopped with some confusion, for it suddenly seemed to him how vain he must appear to be, bragging about his duty in this way. Besides, what could a splendid creature like this care about the small organic details of a native infantry regiment, a thing regarded by society generally, and young ladies in particular for the first three or four years of spinsterhood—if it lasted so long—as altogether beneath serious interest?

Miss Cunningham, however, persisted in her inquiries. She had come to India, and wanted to know all about the country and the people, she said. The Lascars on board the steamer were insignificant-looking people; but her papa's jemadar, who met her at Calcutta, had a most dignified appearance, and was so attentive and well-bred: although she could not understand a word he said, he seemed to know exactly what to do; and then he sat on the coach-box the whole way from Calcutta; she was really quite ashamed that he should be exposed to such hardships, while she was travelling at her ease.

The conversation ran on in this wise for a

few minutes. Miss Cunningham, who had taken pity on the forlorn condition of the young fellow sitting on the outside of the circle, and snubbed by Mrs Polwheedle, was trying to set him at his ease ; and while that lady was discoursing at some length to the other guests on a point of domestic economy, Yorke, becoming emboldened by his hostess's sympathetic manner, was gradually acquiring a little self-possession, and had got to the point of explaining the difference between a subahdar and a havildar, when fresh visitors were announced, and the other gentlemen rose to take their departure. Yorke perforce followed the example of the rest ; and as Miss Cunningham at parting held out her hand with a frank gracious smile, he felt that the void in his existence, of which he had been for some time conscious, was now at once more than filled up.

"Gave the old lady as good as she brought," said Mr Rowell to Yorke, under the great portico, as he stepped into the tandem-cart after his companion ; "that's the way to deal with her. You stick up to her, my good fellow, whenever she tries the patronising dodge, and you will soon put a stop to it."

## CHAPTER III.

YORKE and Spragge had engaged themselves to luncheon with the latter's cousin, Captain Sparrow, the assistant commissioner, who occupied a small house within the Residency grounds formerly belonging to the assistant resident; and to this the two young officers repaired after their morning call. In the verandah was a lesser band of red-coated myrmidons, who ushered the visitors into a sitting-room, and proceeded to the adjacent court-house to summon Captain Sparrow. That gentleman suspended the progress of the suit which he was engaged in hearing, and presently joined them with languidly affable greetings.

"You gentlemen look quite warm in your red jackets," observed their host, as they sat down to luncheon; "but pray unbutton them if you like, and make yourselves comfortable.

Liberty hall this, you see—a mere bachelor's den." Captain Sparrow, however, was dressed himself with a degree of care unusual in an Indian official at his daily work; and as he said this, he threw a glance round the room, by way of drawing attention to its appointments.

"Bachelor's den indeed!" cried his cousin; "none of your humbug, Ted. You know that you always set up for being a swell. See what it is to be in civil employ, Yorke! But you're a bigger swell than ever since you've been home, Ted. I suppose you brought all these nobby pictures back with you," he added, looking up at the walls, which were adorned with various specimens of the graver's art; "and all this new plate. Never saw a bachelor's house like it before, leave alone a den."

"Ah, you wouldn't think much of this if you saw the well-appointed establishments some men have in England; the thing is not to be done with native servants, and especially by a busy man like myself, who have no time to look after my household; still, I like to have things neat about my little place."

"Little place indeed!" replied Spragge. "Why, you might put the whole of our bunga-

low into this room, roof and all—couldn't he, Arty? Well, at any rate, you don't want much preparation before changing your state. Only one more thing wanted to complete the arrangement, eh? And now here is the lady arrived all ready and at hand. I envy you your opportunities, my dear fellow. See what it is to be a swell civilian instead of a poor N.I. sub. I declare I must take to studying the language or mugging up history, like Yorke here. However, it's too late to cut you out this time, I suppose."

"Oh, as to that," said his cousin, with a pleased simper, "you mustn't suppose that there is anything serious in that quarter. You harum-scarum soldiers fancy that if a man doesn't like living in a barn he must be bent on matrimony. For my part, I think marrying is a mistake, at any rate till you get on in life. It ties a man down too much; and children may be all very well in England, with a proper staff of nurses to look after them, but they are dreadfully in the way out here. When a man goes home with a certain position and no encumbrances, you see, the pleasures of society are open to him, and he is free to travel, and so on. A very agreeable life I can assure you; but it comes to an end



too soon. The only thing left now is to look forward to one's next furlough." And as the speaker concluded he cast his eyes over the table-cloth, as if surveying there the refined pleasures offered by a view of Europe to the cultivated man without encumbrances.

His cousin winked at Yorke by way of hint that he was going to draw the captain out.

"No, no, Ted, that won't do. You don't mean to tell me that you're not going to make the running in that line. Wouldn't I, just, if I had your chances! Why, I suppose you are in and out of the Residency like a tame dog?"

Captain Sparrow was evidently nettled at his cousin's want of reverence, displayed, too, before a third party; but he condoned it in consideration of the opening afforded to talk about himself, so replied, drawing up both himself and his shirt-collar—

"If you mean that I have the *entrée* of Cunningham's house, just as he has of mine, of course. But we don't carry the Jack-and-Tom school of manners which appears still to pervade Native Infantry messes into civilised life, my dear fellow. Of course I could invite myself there at any time; but now Cunningham is so

much occupied with his daughter that he leaves all cutchery business to his deputy—and, in fact, you must excuse my running away presently, but I have scarcely a minute to call my own; and, to tell you the truth, I don't much care about making one of the party when they are simply *en famille*,—one must draw the line somewhere.” And Captain Sparrow looked mysterious, and stopped, as evidently inviting further inquiry.

This was at once made, Yorke feeling more interested than ever in the conversation.

Captain Sparrow explained that Miss Cunningham had brought out a French servant with her, a lady's-maid, at any rate she came out as a second-class passenger on board the steamer; but now, forsooth, her mistress had established her as a sort of companion, and she took her meals at the same table with Mr Cunningham and his daughter, when they were alone.

“I shouldn't mind that a bit,” said Spragge, “if she's nice-looking, and don't eat with her knife.”

“That's hardly a criterion, my good fellow,” replied the captain, with an air of superiority; “if you had travelled on the Continent, you

would have seen quite elegant women at the *tables d'hôte* lapping up their food with their knives. That's merely an insular prejudice of yours. Oh no; the girl is well enough in her way, but still there is an etiquette in these things."

"I shouldn't care a bit about etiquette, for my part," said Spragge. "If she's a pretty girl, I'd rather take her in to dinner any day than Mother Polwheedle. But I shouldn't be able to talk her lingo, which would be a drawback."

"You need not be alarmed on that score. Justine understands English perfectly, and talks it well enough, and without the vulgarisms some people employ; but still there is a propriety in these things, you know—*est modus in rebus*."

One crumb of comfort Yorke carried away, as he mounted his pony to ride home. Sparrow was not a favoured suitor, as appeared at first sight to be his natural position. Unless a thorough dissembler, which was evidently not his character, he could not be at present even a suitor at all. This conclusion reconciled Yorke to having partaken of luncheon under his roof, which at one time during the visit had seemed to the young fellow as opposed to honourable

dealing. This at any rate was some consolation, as he cantered on his pony by the side of his companion, depressed, and yet not hopeless.

“Something like a young lady, by Jove!” cried Spragge, breaking the silence at last, as, on nearing the cantonments, they reduced their pace to a walk. “You don’t often see such beauty as that in these parts. And no end of money, too, I expect. Old Cunningham must have saved handsomely; for beyond giving dinners and keeping elephants, he can’t have had anything to spend his pay on. All those fellows in red tunics are kept up for him by Government, and, I daresay, half his private servants too, if the truth were known. It’s only we poor beggars of subalterns who have to pay for our bearers.”

“How much does the commissioner get?”

“Four thousand one hundred and sixty-six rupees a-month, the pay of twenty ensigns; think of that, my boy: the mind almost refuses to grasp such a sum. My cousin Teddy gets a thousand a-month, which is pretty well, and spends it, too, on his pictures, and side-dishes, and fiddle-faddle. However, he’s not half a bad fellow, Ted isn’t, after all; he stood security for me once when I

was harder up even than I am now. See what it is to get a civil appointment. I wish I could make up my mind to pass; but those black classics are the very deuce, and that's a fact. However, a scholar like you is sure to get something or other one of these days, and become a swell like Teddy; and then when some Miss Cunningham of the future comes out, it will be your turn to go in and win."

Too late then, thought Yorke, bitterly, as the other's random talk shot home. It must be now or never. And what chance is there that the prize will keep so long, till I am ready to claim it? Yet that night the young fellow sat up at work till late after mess; and all next day, while his chum was at a cricket-match, he stayed in the little bungalow over his books, only leaving them towards sundown, when he mounted his pony and took the way of the Course.

The Mall or Course of Mustaphabad was about two miles long, bordered by trees, and bounded on each side by the mud-banks which enclosed the rectangular spaces allotted for officers' houses—spaces some of them converted into neat gardens, some laid out in grass, some left in a state of nature, a small desert of baked mud or sand,

as the case might be. The road was a wide one, macadamised for carriages in the middle, a sandy track on either side left soft for riders, and watered to keep down the dust.

The prospect was not lively, nor was there a soul yet to be seen, for he had come out too soon ; he had not spoken to any one all day ; life seemed flat, stale, and unprofitable ; and as he rode at foot-pace along the Mall, his heart sank within him. What if a military career was to be always like this ?

Presently a moving object appeared in the far perspective, which in the fulness of time developed into a buggy and horse with two occupants, Tirtell of the 80th N.I. driving his young wife. So, after all, matrimony was possible even for a subaltern on regimental duty. And for a moment a vision passed across his mind, as of himself driving a buggy with some one by his side, her dress touching him, and even the idea sent a thrill through his frame. Could it be possible the time should ever come when some loved object should be driving by his side, looking frankly into his face, and smiling, and he talking to her at his ease, as Tirtell did to his wife ? Everybody said Mrs Tirtell was very clever, which

certainly Tirtell was not, yet he was talking quite without embarrassment, and his wife was laughing at what he said. No ; this would be too much happiness for a human being. Besides, he could not associate such a noble presence as Miss Cunningham's with a buggy—nothing less than a barouche would befit so peerless a creature. But why build up these foolish castles in the air ? Miss Cunningham the bride of a penniless subaltern of native infantry ! And yet why despair ? Surely his patient efforts to qualify for preferment would be rewarded before long. Everybody said that India was a country where any man could win success without interest or favour, merely by deserving it. And if Mr Cunningham should be averse to his daughter marrying an officer of irregular cavalry or the quarter-master-general's department (for to one or other of these goals did his ambition now point), why, surely her father's interest could easily obtain for him an assistant-commissionership ; and once in the civil line, the road to wealth and preferment was easy.

A current of ideas somewhat in this fashion passed through the young fellow's mind, as his pony with loose rein bore him slowly along the Mall, now beginning to show a sprinkling of

visitors. A couple of hussar officers in their braided frock-coats, and trousers with gold-lace stripes, mounted on their Arab chargers ; a couple of horse-artillery officers, distinguishable from the cavalry only by red instead of gold stripes ; Chupkin of the irregulars, in a uniform designed by his commanding officer after a Continental tour, which had borrowed a trifle in lace and embroidery from every cavalry costume in Europe, his wife riding his second charger ; the brigadier, a stout red-faced man, mounted on the Cabulee cob which had been the subject of discussion the day before ; foot-artillery and infantry officers, blue and red jacketed, and more or less well mounted ; married captains driving their wives in buggies ; married field-officers, with their wives and children in barouches and pair ; Dispenser, the superintending surgeon, who had a family at home as well as in India, and was supposed to be heavily in the banks, in a barouche and one ; some forty or fifty people distributed over the two miles or so of road, with the substitution of coloured uniforms for white linen jackets and trousers, gave the place quite a lively appearance by contrast with the monotony of the hot season just ended. Mrs Polwheedle, of course, was



there, seated in an extra large barouche as became a brigadier's lady, and being short-sighted, merely raised a double eyeglass and stared at our subaltern as she passed him, thereby checking him short in his half-made bow ; and see, can it be ?—yes, it is—that must be the commissioner's carriage with the two mounted orderlies riding behind it,—Mr Cunningham himself, who had never been known to take a drive on the Mall before, with his daughter beside him. She will never recognise me, thought the youngster bitterly ; how can she be expected to remember one face in particular among so many new ones as she must have seen during the last two days ? But no, he was mistaken, for as the carriage passed quickly by, Miss Cunningham, turning towards him, gave a gracious bow and smile, and Yorke felt himself turning scarlet as he lifted his cap in reply. How different, thought he, while recovering his composure after the salute—how different from the sort of bow one generally gets from our young ladies ! Miss Glumme, for instance, gives a solemn bend without moving a muscle of her face, as if performing a mournful duty ; while with Miss Peart a jerky little nod of the head would suffice. A queen

could not have been more gracious, and surely she looks even more beautiful in a bonnet than without one. Who says that the present fashion in bonnets is unbecoming? I suppose the little brunette in the back-seat was the French maid Sparrow was so indignant at having to sit down to table with. The blockhead! her waiting-woman will be quite as good as most of our station belles, I'll be bound. No woman could be long in her presence without gaining something of grace and refinement from the contact.

Thus musing, the young fellow turned his pony's head, and cantered back after the carriage toward the other end of the Course, where most of the company were now assembled by the band-stand; for this was the evening of the week when the band of the Hussars played out.

The commissioner's carriage was drawn up with the others round the stand, a ring being left between the performers and the horses, in which the various children, alighted from their parents' carriages, were at play. On one side of it was that of Mrs Polwheedle, leaving no room for a horseman to interpose. The other side, that on which Miss Cunningham sat, was open; but just as Yorke with the courage of despair was about

to ride up to it, the vacant place was taken by Colonel Tartar of the Hussars. Yorke could not but admire the little colonel's self-possession, as he sat lounging in the saddle, flapping the flies away from the neck of his handsome Arab pony with the brush at the end of his riding-cane, and talking to Miss Cunningham with as much ease as if he were laying down the law in the ante-room of his own mess. Ah! what a position was that! a bare twenty years' service and the command of a regiment of dragoons, for the senior lieutenant-colonel was brigadier on the staff at another station. Who might not feel at ease under such circumstances, even when speaking to Miss Cunningham? More wonderful than the colonel's self-possession was that he should presently move away from his vantage-ground, and steer his horse round to the other side of Mrs Polwheedle's carriage.

A sudden fit of boldness seized Yorke, and he rode up to the vacant place.

Miss Cunningham did not notice him at first, her head being turned in the other direction, and for a few seconds Yorke sat listening like the rest to the conversation between Mrs Polwheedle and the colonel.

“Really, Colonel Tartar, you must come some day to dine with us and taste our home-fed pork, it is quite delicious. A little pork is such a nice change, you know, after the hot weather; and my appetite is always so delicate, I need a change after the constant poultry and mutton. The brigadier always sees the pigs fed every morning, or else I go myself; we are most particular about looking after them, I can assure you.”

Just then Miss Cunningham turned her head, so that Yorke had no longer any ears for the conversation. Her smile on recognising him was as frank and winning as before, as she said—

“Oh, Mr Yorke, I am afraid you must have thought us very inhospitable in not asking you and your friend to stay and lunch yesterday,—but I had no idea you had ridden so far; it was dark when we passed through cantonments on the morning of our arrival, so it was not till our drive here this evening that I discovered what a distance it is from our house.”

Yorke stammered out something in reply about its not being of the slightest consequence, and the delight it would have been to him to accept the invitation; and then gaining composure

added that they had not had to ride back unrefreshed, for they lunched with her neighbour Captain Sparrow.

“Oh! Captain Sparrow?” said Miss Cunningham, again smiling, and this time, as it seemed, with a gleam of humour in her eye; “yes, he is a very near neighbour of ours—almost our only one; we took early tea with him this morning. How nice and neat his house is; I had no idea that you Indian bachelors were so luxurious.”

The feeling of jealousy with which Yorke listened to anything like commendation about even the appointments of Captain Sparrow’s establishment was mingled with a sort of momentary gratification that Miss Cunningham should be favourably impressed with an Indian bachelor’s household, albeit through such instrumentality; but an immediate reaction passed through his mind against permitting a deception on the point, and he hastened to reply—

“You mustn’t judge of bachelor’s bungalows by Captain Sparrow’s. He is always regarded as the model swell of the place, and besides, he is in civil employ. A bachelor’s bungalow is a very humble affair generally.”

"But it seems a very luxurious arrangement to have a house all to yourself. The bachelors I have known have generally been satisfied with two rooms, or even one."

"But we don't generally have a whole bungalow to ourselves. Mr Spragge and I live together, for instance; and, after all, there are only three rooms in the bungalow altogether, so that we don't exceed your allowance." But at this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of two more cavaliers, and became general, partaking for the most part of inquiries as to how Miss Cunningham had enjoyed her voyage, and what sort of a journey she had had up the country, and what she thought of India, Justine the maid looking straight to her front the while, as if not supposed to listen. "A parcel of boobies Miss Cunningham must think us," said Yorke bitterly to himself all the while, "to talk such twaddle." At last the interview came to an end; the young lady, laying her hand gently on her father's arm—he was a man not given to general conversation, and had been leaning back in the carriage without talking—said that it must be time to drive homewards, as they were expecting friends to dinner. As the

carriage turned round she gave them each a gracious bow, and Yorke riding off slowly to the mess-house to dinner, employed himself in trying to recall each word spoken by her, and to conjure up the tremulous sounds of a voice that still thrilled through him; for Miss Cunningham could not ask a simple question without throwing a certain amount of unconscious pathos into its low tones.

## CHAPTER IV.

YORKE was not the only person fascinated by Miss Cunningham's grace and beauty. On all sides the new arrival was pronounced to be a charming addition to Mustaphabad society, the general chorus of approval being subject perhaps to reservation in the case of the parents of the Misses Glumme and Peart, who must have felt that those young ladies were now displaced from the position of reigning belles which they had occupied since their arrival at Mustaphabad the previous cold season. Entertainments were set on foot in all directions in honour of the occasion, heralded by a ball given by the Hussars, when the new Calcutta mat laid down in their spacious mess-room, and which those gallant officers had ordered specially for the *fête*, was pronounced on all sides to be even better with the pavement underneath, for dancing upon,



than a wooden floor. Not so elastic, perhaps, you know, but so slippery and even. Previous to that occasion our ardent young subaltern had been vouchsafed merely a few glimpses of the lady who now filled all his thoughts. Once, when he passed her driving again on the Course with her father; but, alas! there was no band that evening, and the carriage did not stop. Then, one morning while the 76th were out at drill, and the old major was blundering away worse than ever, till all the officers were visibly out of temper, the adjutant offering his advice without any pretence of concealment for releasing the regiment out of its clubbed state, and even the stolid sepoys were laughing, Yorke—looking from his vantage-ground at the head of the light company across the plain which extended along the front of the station, and which served as parade-ground for the different regiments in garrison—saw some figures on horseback emerging from the cloud of dust which marked the spot where the dragoons were exercising—figures which, as they came nearer, he made out to be the commissioner and his daughter, accompanied by Captain Sparrow and the brigadier on his grey pony. They had evidently been

watching the cavalry, and were now coming to look at the infantry. A sense of shame at the ridiculous figure the regiment presented almost overcame the rising at his heart as the fair vision approached them. Still, a lady would hardly detect the little faults of manœuvring so obvious to the military eye; the men, at any rate, marched well, for the major had not been long enough in command to diminish their efficiency in this respect, and a finer-looking set was not to be seen in the army. Miss Cunningham had expressed a wish to see a sepoy regiment on parade; the party was evidently coming this way at her suggestion. But no! just as they reached the point where the road to the city intersects the plain at right angles to the parade-grounds, and were near enough for Yorke to mark that she was riding a handsome chestnut Arab, and that she looked, if possible, even more graceful in her riding-habit than in ordinary costume, the party stopped, and after exchanging salutations separated, the brigadier alone continuing his course in the direction of the regiment, while the others cantered off towards the city, a slight cloud of dust tracking their steps.

At sight of the approaching brigadier, evidently bent on criticism, for battalion drill was a strong point with him, Major Dumble hastily dismissed the regiment; and while the other officers adjourned to the mess-house, Yorke returned to his bungalow to chew the cud of disappointment.

The next time he saw the fair vision of his waking dreams, she was again driving with her father on the Course, who this time occupied the back-seat with Dr Mackenzie Maxwell, the civil surgeon, — a stranger sitting beside the young lady, a middle-aged, soldierlike man, in plain clothes, wearing a helmet of felt with a white turban round it, and who Yorke thought must be a traveller, such a sun-protecting head-dress not being commonly worn of an evening. Yorke, who did not venture to approach the carriage on this occasion when it stopped near the band, asked Buxey, the station paymaster, sitting alone in his buggy, who the visitor might be. “Be?” replied Buxey; “why, Falkland, of course,” as if the question was a superfluous one; and, indeed, as soon as Yorke heard the name he knew who the stranger was; for Colonel Falkland was famous both in war and peace,

distinguished for gallantry and skill in various campaigns, and holding high office in that part of India, being at present commissioner of the territory adjacent to Mustaphabad. "Is Miss Cunningham's godfather, you know," continued Buxey. "She was born in '36, at Benares; Cunningham was assistant-magistrate there, and Falkland and I were stationed there with our regiments, ensigns both of us. Mackenzie Maxwell was there too; he had just joined the —th on first coming out, as assistant-surgeon. Falkland and Cunningham were great friends even then; and when Mrs Cunningham died — she was a famous beauty, poor thing, and died in the first year after her marriage—Falkland used to spend the best part of his time at Cunningham's house, looking after the baby, while its father was at cutchery: hundreds and hundreds of times I suppose he has dandled her on his knee. Then my regiment moved to Dinapore, and he got appointed to the staff in Affghanistan—his first piece of luck that was, for a lot of the fellows in his regiment were killed; and Cunningham sent the child home in charge of Mrs Spangle, the collector's wife at Benares: Spangle was a very crack collector, and would have risen

very high in the service if he hadn't died of liver. And now we are all met again after nearly twenty years, all except Spangle; I knew Falkland would not be long in coming over to see his god-daughter after she arrived. There he is, a brevet-colonel of three years' standing, and me still a captain, although nine and a half months senior to him in the service. See what it is to have luck. I don't grudge Falkland his brevets, you know; he has deserved them if ever a man did: but if our regiment had gone to Cabul, and his had gone down to Dinapore, things might have been very different."

As Yorke looked at Falkland's spare figure and erect carriage, and then at Captain Buxey's portly frame almost filling up the buggy, as he sat with pursed-up lips, small round eyes, and splay feet encased in easy shoes, he could not help thinking that perchance something of the differences in their careers might be due to the individual as well as to luck; but his sense of politeness restrained him from saying so.

Then came the Hussar ball. The invitations, of course, included one for Major Dumble and Officers of the 76th N.I., and Yorke could not resist the temptation to take advantage of it,

although it was almost the first time since the regiment had been stationed at Mustaphabad that he had presented himself at an entertainment of the kind ; for he fancied that the Hussars and people generally were disposed to look down on the Native Infantry. The ball was one of exceptional brilliancy ; for, besides that sundry travellers who were passing through the place had stopped to partake of the festivities, it happened that the camp of an exalted official was pitched there at the time, and the great person honoured the occasion by his presence, accompanied by a brilliant staff. Yorke, though impatient to be there, came late, and the room was quite full when he arrived. In truth, a brilliant spectacle—nearly forty ladies, and perhaps a hundred and fifty gentlemen, almost all officers in uniform ; so large an assembly had never before been witnessed in Mustaphabad. But for our subaltern there was only one lady in the room, sitting, as he entered, on an ottoman at the far end. A dance was in progress, in which all the younger men who could get partners were engaged, and only two cavaliers were in immediate attendance on Miss Cunningham, —Captain Buxey on one side, whose stout figure,

cased in a tight coatee, appeared in conspicuous profile as he stooped to talk to the lady; Colonel Tartar on the other. Yorke envied the paymaster his ease and self-possession, although, to be sure, he was old enough to be her father; but they were as nothing to the coolness of Colonel Tartar, who was lolling on the couch, resting on his left elbow, and nursing a leg with his right hand, so that Miss Cunningham had to turn half round and look quite down to speak to him. "Confound his impudence!" thought Yorke; "it is all very well to give himself airs with ordinary ladies, but has the man no sense of propriety to behave like this before such a goddess even in his own ball-room?"

Presently the colonel got up and walked away in a careless manner, and in a sudden fit of boldness Yorke approached the vacant spot.

Miss Cunningham gave him a gracious bow of recognition.

Yorke asked if he might venture to hope for the honour of dancing with her.

"I am really very sorry," she said, with a winning smile, "but I am afraid I am engaged for everything." She spoke as if she really were

sorry for his disappointment, and held out her card for him to look at it. "Again how different from most of our young ladies!" he thought. "Miss Peart, now, would have given a flippant toss to her silly little head, and laughed as if it were great fun to be able to refuse an invitation, and snub a fellow." Then he said aloud, looking at the card, "There are no names down after the twelfth dance; may I venture to hope——"

"I am sorry," she said again, in her low rich voice, "but we are not going to stay after that; papa is not very well to-night, and so we are going away early."

Just then Captain Buxey walked off to speak to one of the great official's staff, and Yorke was left standing alone by her.

"Won't you sit down?" said the lady, with a slight wave of her hand towards the place on her right left vacant by Colonel Tartar.

The young fellow did as he was bid, fancying that all eyes were turned towards him. Every nerve in his body seemed to be in action; it was as if he could hear his heart beat. His boot just touched the edge of her dress as it rested on the



ground. It seemed like desecration, yet he dared not move.

Whether it was to relieve him from the embarrassment she noticed, or because she was wholly unconscious of it, she made a beginning of the conversation.

"What a very interesting sight this is, the variety of uniforms makes the scene so brilliant! I have never been to a military ball before, you know. In England one only knows military men by their titles; you scarcely ever see them in uniform."

"I thought you had lived mostly abroad?"

"Yes, so I have; but in France one does not meet with officers much in society. A great many of them, I believe, have risen from the ranks, and they seem rough in their manners. The Austrian officers we used to see in Italy appeared to be gentlemen-like, but my aunt's friends were chiefly among the Italians, and they, you know, don't mix at all with the Austrians. I never was in any military society till now."

Yorke worked himself up into a state of frenzy to find something clever to say in reply, but no epigrammatic generalisation which would cover

the French and Austrian armies or Italian politics came uppermost, and Miss Cunningham went on.

"I suppose all the officers dressed like Colonel Tartar belong to his regiment?"

"Yes," said Yorke, who had now found words, "and a very handsome uniform it is."

"And those other officers in blue with the embroidered jackets, are they Hussars also?"

"No, those are the Horse-Artillery, and those in the plain blue coats are the Foot-Artillery. They are all one regiment, you know, but officers are picked out to serve with the troops of Horse-Artillery, which is quite the crack branch of the service," he added; for our subaltern, although sensitive about the inferiority of his own position, had no small feeling of jealousy prompting him to disparage the others.

"And those in scarlet with embroidered coats?" continued the young lady.

"Oh! those are the headquarter swells—I mean," he stammered, "the headquarter staff. Lucky fellows, they get tremendous salaries, march about all the cold season, and go up to the hills in the hot."

"And who is that officer like a Circassian noble? Is that a fancy dress?"

"Oh no, that is Mr Chupkin of the Irregulars. Well, it is a fancy dress so far, that they wear pretty much what they fancy in the Irregular Cavalry; but that is their regular uniform, at least for a ball-room: they dress like the men on parade and without all that gold embroidery. Ah! that is the service," he continued with enthusiasm; "I would almost rather get into the Irregular Cavalry than even into the Quarter-master-General's department. Excuse my talking shop in this way," he added, apologetically, observing that the fair listener looked puzzled; "but everybody here is so accustomed to the ins and outs of the service, that one forgets you would not take an interest in it."

"But I do take an interest in it," replied the young lady, looking at him with a frank smile. "I want to learn all about these things. But you speak of leaving your own branch of the service. Surely you are proud of commanding those fine-looking sepoy, they look so 'soldier-like and manly mounting sentry at our house; and papa tells me that yours is a very fine regiment; I suppose that is a reason why your dress

is different from that of the other infantry officers."

Yorke blushed as the fair speaker glanced at the wings which he wore instead of epaulets. Could she be wishing to please and flatter? and yet her manner was as if she were ten years older than himself.

He muttered something about his being attached to a flank company, although he was commanding another, and about the 76th being considered a crack corps, yet the next moment was angry with himself for the indiscretion. What a vain simple creature she must think him! With her penetration she must have found out by this time in what small account a native infantry officer was held, and must be laughing at his simple talk about a crack corps.

"There seems such a reality about the soldier's life here," continued the young lady; "one feels quite as if living in a camp. All the officers seem to have medals,"—then, noticing that there was no decoration on her companion's breast, she added quickly, "at least those who have not are sure, I suppose, to have opportunities for distinction sooner or later?"

"Oh no, there is no chance of any such luck,"

replied the youngster, bitterly ; " there are no enemies left to fight now. No, Miss Cunningham, I am afraid we subs have joined too late for any honour and glory. The only thing left for a fellow nowadays, if he cannot get into the Irregular Cavalry or the Quartermaster-General's department, is civil employ, or even the public works ; anything is better than regimental duty."

" Leave the army ? " asked Miss Cunningham, turning round and looking at him full in the face ; when something in his earnest glance made her turn her eyes away again. Then she added in a lower voice, and looking straight before her, " The army is such a noble profession ! "

Yorke felt ready to register a vow that he would stick to the regiment come what might, but he bethought him to rejoin—

" Look at Colonel Falkland, he is in civil employ, and yet there is not a finer soldier in the army."

" What is that about Colonel Falkland ? " said a musical voice, while at the same time a hand was laid on his shoulder, and looking up he saw that the speaker was Colonel Falkland himself.

" I was reproaching Mr Yorke for want of

military spirit, because he talked of leaving the army," said Miss Cunningham, archly, "and he cited you as a precedent ; but you have not left the army, surely ? "

"Our young friend's aspirations are very natural," said the colonel, smiling kindly ; "we military civilians get all the loaves and fishes in peace-time, and then when campaigning is going on we fall back into our old places, and are very much in the way of our brother officers, I am afraid, who have been doing all the dull work in peace-time."

"No, I didn't mean that, sir," broke in the youngster ; "but Miss Cunningham misunderstood me : I wouldn't leave the army for the world ; but I was just going to explain how you were in civil employ and yet had served in all the campaigns too, and had got your brevet for the Sutlej, and another step and a C.B. for——"

"Just what I was saying," replied the colonel, laughing ; "only you put it in a more generous way. We lucky fellows come in for all the good things on both sides ; but your turn will come too, I don't doubt. Every man gets his chance in India, if he is only ready for it. But here is another lucky person, Olivia, for he is

coming to claim you for a dance." Then, as an officer of the staff led Miss Cunningham away to a quadrille, Colonel Falkland fell to questioning our subaltern about himself—asked him if he had passed in the language, and whether there was the full number of absentee officers in his regiment, or if there were still room for one of those now with it to obtain an appointment.

Yorke explained that there was already the full number of seven absentees, besides those on furlough; and, led away by the colonel's sympathetic interest in his affairs, he went on to say that he had passed in Hindustani, and was hard at work studying military science, so as to be ready for anything that might turn up. "But then you see, sir," he added, "there isn't much chance of an opening, for Braddon is sure to have the first vacancy. They can't keep a man like him on regimental duty for ever; it's over two years since he was sent back to the regiment."

"Braddon?" said the colonel. "So he belongs to your regiment? Of course, I ought to have remembered that he did. Is he here to-night? I don't recognise his face."

"Oh no, he never shows in public unless he's obliged. You can't expect a man to go about much under such circumstances."

"Tell me," asked the colonel, after a pause—"I don't want to force confidence, but I should be very glad to know if he is going on steadily."

"No fear about him, sir," replied Yorke, stoutly. "And he will come to the front again one of these days, you will see. There is not a finer officer of his standing in the army, unless it be Captain Kirke, and I should feel it a regular shame if I got an appointment before him; although, of course, I am on the look-out too—it's only natural, you know, sir."

Colonel Falkland admitted that it was quite natural, and added, heartily, that he hoped his energy would find some fit scope; and as he moved off, Yorke understood the cause of the colonel's popularity, and the respect and admiration felt by all who served with him. He had come under the influence of the charm of his clear, kindly eye, his sweet voice, his courteous yet sincere manner, the sympathy which turned the conversation to the concerns of his companion, the modesty and unselfishness which diverted it from himself. Falkland walked with



a slight limp, the effect of a wound received at Sobraon, and wore plain clothes, not well fitting—the only person, besides the commissioner and the station-chaplain, so dressed. And he could scarcely be called handsome; yet Yorke thought him the most distinguished-looking man in the room, not excepting the very distinguished personage who was present.

But not even Colonel Falkland could distract his attention long from the one object which had brought him to the ball. Miss Cunningham was now dancing with Colonel Tartar, who danced well, but was not quite so tall as his partner. "Most women," thought Yorke as he watched her, "would look awkward in such case; but she can't help looking like a princess. She doesn't dance as if it were a tremendous joke, or as if she were performing a condescension, but as if it were a duty, and yet a pleasant one, to please her partner; and how well she keeps him on his good behaviour, and yet without absolutely snubbing him. Miss Glumme now, or Miss Peart, would be so pleased at being asked to dance by Tartar, that they would allow him to be as impudent as he pleased. Miss Glumme wouldn't understand it, and Miss Peart would

enjoy it. But what am I, a poor subaltern of native infantry—with these confounded wings too, which make a fellow look ridiculous—to think of ever winning such a peerless creature as that! I daresay she looks on me as a mere boy, and yet I must be a good five years older, for according to Buxey she is only twenty-one. After all, I may get my company in a few years, and then with a war and a brevet-majority perhaps, her father would not object. But how can I expect her to remain unwon all the time, and have I made even a single step in advance? What a simpleton I must have seemed this evening, with my jargon about the Quartermaster-General's department, and holding two companies! Why couldn't I talk like a man of the world, such as she must have been accustomed to meet with at home?"

Thus mused the young man, moodily gazing towards her, as she danced with one partner after another, watching her movements from a corner so fixedly that if the rest of the company had not been engaged in their own concerns, his preoccupation would have been noticed. Once indeed her eyes met his, as she stopped with her partner in the course of a waltz just

opposite to where he was standing, and she gave him a glance of acknowledgment which set the young man's heart bounding.

Again Yorke established himself nearly opposite the rout-seat on which she was resting between the dances, in the archway which divided the long room ; and this time, when she looked up towards him, her face flushed and took a sudden expression of surprise and anxiety, which caused him to drop his eyes and move away, reproaching himself for his too pointed attention, and yet inwardly rejoicing at what he had observed. Surely, he thought, she has learnt my secret ; and if I have been too bold and too quick, still she has not treated it with scorn, as she might have done. Something at least has been gained already in my suit. Had Yorke, however, turned round and looked behind him, he would have understood that something other than his ardent glances caused the distress which the lady exhibited.

Shortly after this, Miss Cunningham was led into the supper-tent by Major Winge of the Hussars,—a married man with a large family, thought Yorke with a sigh of relief ; and then, just as he was summoning up strength of mind

to follow the more distinguished guests there, the young lady emerged again therefrom with her father and Colonel Falkland, and stepping into their carriage, the party drove off.

Yorke passed into the tent, where, among other persons, was Mrs Polwheedle under escort of the eminent personage, who stood by the supper-table while she partook liberally of trifle and champagne; but not even her evident gratification at this distinguished position could conceal a certain sense of uneasiness. "Yes, your Excellency," she observed between the mouthfuls, "a very sweet girl indeed; but I never saw such a thing done before. The brigadier always gives the *pas* to the commissioner, of course, for he is a civilian of twenty-eight years' standing, and so takes rank over a colonel of '51; although I really think that by rights a brigadier commanding a first-class district, and reporting direct to headquarters, ought to be considered as good as a major-general. I hope your Excellency will forgive my boldness in saying so; but if the commissioner were as old as Methuselah it would not make his daughter take rank before any married lady whatever, let alone a brigadier's lady. And your Excellency knows,—who better,

indeed?—that it is a rule for parties not to break up till the senior lady present takes her departure. It is really taking a great deal upon herself for a young girl like that to go off in that way from the very tent-door, in front of everybody, almost, as you may say, before supper is half over.”

His Excellency observed gravely that it certainly was a sad breach of decorum, but that the young lady was probably ignorant of the rules in such cases, and that her father was understood to be unwell, and indeed looked hardly fit for late hours.

“Oh, of course, your Excellency,” replied the lady, “it was not done on purpose; she has not been much in society, I daresay, poor dear girl—has lived chiefly abroad, where you meet very queer people, I believe; still the commissioner might have told her to say a word before going, just to explain matters, you know. And as for being too ill to stay, I am sure when we were stationed at Dinapore, and the brigadier was only commanding his regiment, the civilians at Patna used to give most elegant entertainments, and many’s the time I have stayed till I was ready to drop, waiting till the general’s lady

should go first, for I always respected other people's position ; and although people say I look so strong, I can assure your Excellency I am often exceedingly delicate, especially being so subject to a rush of blood to the head. If others can put up with illness, so might some people, I think. I have never seen such a thing before since the brigadier has commanded the station, never."

"But it was papa who was unwell, not the young lady," observed her partner, with a solemn countenance ; "however, no doubt, as you rightly observe, it was a shocking solecism ; but perhaps a hint from you on the subject would prevent its happening again. Your advice in matters of etiquette and good taste would be quite invaluable to young persons entering on life here. I suppose it would be no good asking you to take anything more ? Shall we make way for the hungry folks behind us ?" and so saying, his Excellency, offering his arm, escorted the lady now radiant with smiles back to the dancing-room.

"Seen his Excellency doing the polite to Mother Polwheedle ?" said Jerry Spragge to a brother sub, as he helped himself to a glass of champagne.

"I should rather think so," replied the other, following the example; "best thing out by a long way."

"Did you see Kirke here just now?" said one officer of a native infantry regiment to another, later in the evening, as they stood together in the doorway, watching the dancers.

"Yes," said the other. "I thought it had been settled he was to go back to his regiment; but I suppose that must have been a mistake, or he would not have been here in the uniform of his irregulars."

"Oh no; he has been sent back to regimental duty beyond a doubt, and has had a close shave of a court-martial—the order will be in the next Gazette. I had it from one of the headquarter people."

"Well, it was a cool thing to come here at all under the circumstances, still more to come in the uniform of a corps he has been dismissed from, and with his Excellency in the room, too. I shouldn't be surprised if Tartar and the Husars were to take the thing up."

"He was only here for a minute or two. I saw the commissioner talking to him, apparently

in remonstrance, and he went away immediately afterwards. He is a cousin of the commissioner, you know."

"Well, I am sorry for him," said the last speaker; "although I believe there is little doubt any other man might have been turned out of the service for what he did. It is a pity so fine a soldier can't keep his hands clean."

"A pity indeed. Do you remember the day he pulled our regiment out of that mess?"

"Do I not? By Jove! if he hadn't charged into that mass of Sikhs at the critical moment, and given us time to form up again, we should have come to grief, and no mistake."

"You may say so, indeed. Our fellows were uncommon shaky just at that moment — all abroad, in fact. I shall never forget Kirke's look as he rode past us, waving that long sword of his, and his eye flashing fire; he looked the very model of a cavalry leader. He had only one squadron with him, and the Sikhs he went at must have been five or six hundred if there was a man. If Victoria Crosses had been going in those days, Kirke ought to have had one for that charge."

"There was another man in the room just now



who ought to have had a Victoria Cross, if these things went by merit."

"You mean Falkland?"

"Yes. You were not at Ferozeshah? Ah, my boy, there were wigs on the green that day, and no mistake, and pale faces too! It was just touch and go at one time, I can tell you. Falkland was worth a dozen men to the chief and Lord Hardinge on that day."

"It is strange that these men who promise so well cannot keep straight. There is Braddon, now, as fine a soldier in his line as Kirke, and he, too, must needs get into trouble, although in a different way."

"Yes, and his case will be more difficult to set right. When a man takes to shaking his elbow, there is seldom much chance of a cure. 'Tis a sad pity."

Kirke's appearance at the ball, which the two officers had been discussing, happened in this wise. While Yorke was standing in the archway, as above described, looking at the one object which engaged his attention, an officer had just entered the room behind him—a handsome, well-built, dark-complexioned man, somewhat above middle height, with a hard, resolute,

but good-natured face, smooth shaven save for a large black moustache, with clear cold grey eyes, dressed in a blue tunic with heavy gold embroidery, a scarlet shawl round his waist, and a long straight sword suspended from a shoulder-belt. He, too, was looking towards Miss Cunningham, and it was at sight of him that she betrayed the confusion which Yorke too credulously ascribed to his own love-stricken gaze. Had he looked round, he would have seen Mr Cunningham step forward from the side of the room where he was in conversation with the military secretary, and address the new comer apparently in terms of remonstrance, the young lady the while looking down in confusion, studying the point of her little foot as it peeped out from below her dress, as if not daring to watch, yet absorbed in what passed ; and that eventually her father fell back into his former place, while Kirke, after occupying his ground some little time, disappeared from the room.

As for Yorke, he went home, soon after the commissioner's party left, in a state of rapture qualified by occasional misgivings, treasuring up each word that had been spoken, each look that had been exchanged.

## CHAPTER V.

THE visit of the distinguished personage to Mustaphabad was of course made the occasion for holding a grand review of all the troops at the station, which took place at seven o'clock the next morning but one after the ball. According to usual practice at such exhibitions, the brigade was organised for the purpose as a complete division of all arms. Colonel Tartar assumed command of the cavalry and horse-artillery, his own regiment being taken charge of for the day by Major Winge ; similarly Brevet-Major Gurney of the horse-artillery, in the absence of any regimental field-officer, took charge of the whole arm, so that his troop fell to be commanded by Lieutenant Cubitt, who rode past proudly at the head of it. The four battalions of infantry were divided into two brigades under the senior field-officers, giving temporary steps of promotion of

the same sort ; while the number of acting appointments made, of brigade-majors, aides-de-camp, and orderly officers, covered the ground with a motley staff in every variety of uniform, and mounted on every description of steed, from high-caste Arab to Deccanee pony, and left hardly any officers for regimental duty. None of these good things, however, fell to the lot of our subaltern, who was fain to be content with his place at the head of the light company of his regiment.

The force was drawn up in the first instance in line of battalions in column, with the horse-artillery and cavalry on the right, and the field-battery on the left ; and as the 76th move down from their regimental parade to take up their appointed place, Yorke scans the miscellaneous company of equestrians and occupants of carriages assembled by the saluting-flag, looking in vain for the one object which makes the review, and life generally, interesting to him. "Here she comes at last," he said to himself, with a flutter at his heart, as he descried three riders cantering across the plain from the direction of the city. Even at this distance he can distinguish them—the Commissioner and Colonel

Falkland, each riding a big horse, and Miss Cunningham on her little high-bred chestnut Arab between them. But now the 76th wheel into their place; and our subaltern in the hindmost company finds his view for the present limited by the backs of the rear-rank of number eight.

Presently there is a stir, and the line is called to attention, the word of command being repeated by acting brigadiers, and again by commanders of battalions. It is evident that the eminent personage and his staff are coming on the ground; but Yorke can see nothing. Then the word is given to present arms, while the bands strike up, very improperly, the national anthem. Then there is a tedious pause for all in the rear: the eminent personage, accompanied by the brigadier and staff, is riding down the line from right to left. There is perfect silence through the ranks, broken only by the occasional move of a battery-horse shaking its harness. Peeping to his left, Yorke gets a momentary glimpse of the different cavaliers as they pass along the field of view of the little lane between his regiment, which is on the left of the infantry, and the adjacent field-battery. First, various staff officers, singly or in couples; then

the eminent personage on a big English horse, the brigadier on his Cabulee cob ambling by his side, and looking up in conversation ; then a motley group of other staff officers, including the happy holders of acting appointments for the day. Among these are three or four ladies, one of whom Yorke recognises in his momentary view as plainly as if he had been looking for an hour. Miss Cunningham riding between two men in plain clothes, one in a round hat, the other strong and erect, wearing a sun-helmet. And now the cavalcade having reached the end of the line, turns round the flank of the field-battery, and begins to return by the rear, the eminent personage as he rides along at a foot-pace regarding intently the backs of the men, as if the spectacle afforded him the deepest interest. Our subaltern of course can see nothing, for he must needs look straight to his front ; but soon the sound of voices and subdued laughter announces that the tail of the equestrian party is passing behind him, and he feels the hardness of the fate which keeps him a mere dust-crusher, while so many other fellows are enjoying themselves on horseback ; still more at not knowing whether Miss Cunningham even so much as saw him. Just at this

moment two artillery horses, tired of standing at attention, took to fighting and kicking, and the challenge being taken up by several others, a sensible commotion was caused in the cavalcade ; and hearing a little feminine scream, York could not resist looking round. The cry had proceeded from Miss Peart, whose country-bred pony, with the combative habits of its race, had replied to the challenge by kicking out at the beast next to it, which happily being that of Mr Lunge, the riding-master of the Hussars, a gaunt and lofty animal, had kept its rider's legs beyond range of the pony's heels ; but the commotion had set Miss Cunningham's lively chestnut Arab a-prancing, and Yorke had just time to notice the grace with which its rider kept her seat.

And now begins the serious business of the day. First, the horse-artillery and cavalry canter to the front, and the former open a hot fire on an imaginary enemy ; soon the latter is found to be in force, the guns are retired, and the infantry advance into action, the first brigade leading with skirmishers in advance, the second brigade in column in reserve. The said skirmishers advance in approved form, running forward a little way at the rate of about three miles

an hour, then lying down and firing; and the parade being as flat as a billiard-table, without any cover or irregularity of surface as large as a walnut, this proceeding is by general consent pronounced to be a most vivid representation of the realities of war. Then of a sudden the enemy is supposed to disappear from the front, and appear simultaneously on the right flank, a transformation which naturally involves a change of front on the part of our side—a favourite manœuvre of the brigadier in fact, executed in his best style. And now the force, its unprotected left flank pointing in the direction towards which it had just been fighting, goes to work again in the same approved style—skirmishers lying down, the supports standing just far enough off to get all the shots meant for the other, the whole advancing at about half-a-mile an hour. But now the first brigade has had enough of it, and falls back on the second, advancing thereon in line to support it. This is surely the crisis of the day, the time of all others to be watching the infantry—to see especially the 76th marching in line like a living wall. But, alas! Yorke throwing a hurried glance across the field of view, sees that the



equestrian spectators are following in the wake of the dust of the cavalry, executing some mysterious manœuvre in the far distance, and is more than ever oppressed with a sense of his own insignificance. The grand advance of the second brigade is practically thrown away, and all interest now centres in the charge made across their front by the returning hussars, with the irregular cavalry close behind them.

There still remains the march past; and as the troops move along to take up their places preparatory to it, our subaltern passing with his battalion just by the saluting flag, observes the eminent personage gallantly bowing to the commissioner and party, as if inviting them to take up a good position close to himself. Mrs Polwheedle's carriage draws up at the same time, and its occupant feels this to be one of the proud moments of her life. It was only a few months ago that an illustrated paper had a woodcut of her Majesty reviewing the troops in Windsor Park, the royal carriage drawn up by the royal standard, and the Prince Consort on horseback just in front. Why, this seemed almost a reproduction of the picture. Here, too, was an eminent personage immediately in front of a

barouche which, if it had not the royal arms on it, was still an elegant vehicle. But unalloyed happiness is seldom the lot of mortals ; the company, it must be confessed, showed a total want of the respect due to high official rank, in pressing so closely round the carriage. Mrs Polwheedle had sounded the brigadier overnight as to the propriety of railing off a space round the flagstaff, to be kept sacred for her carriage, and perhaps the commissioner and his daughter, but that gallant officer said he was afraid such a thing was not usual ; and the crowd of equestrians gradually closed up, till the charmed circle of her fancy was utterly blotted out, the Roman nose of Mr Lunge's horse actually projecting into the carriage. "A pushing man," Mrs Polwheedle was heard to say ; "but these rankers never know manners." Mrs Polwheedle felt with a pang that in this respect the real fell painfully short of the ideal glory suggested by the illustrated paper.

For our subaltern, too, there was a disappointment in store. The time for the infantry was now coming. It was all very well for the cavalry and horse-artillery to go scampering about during a review, kicking up a dust and showing

off; but everybody knows that in a march past the infantry is the sight worth seeing. The steadiest cavalry in the world is not to be compared in steadiness with well-drilled infantry; and if there was a regiment in the Bengal army which could march steadily, it was the 76th. We come last, thought Yorke, but we shall look best; and, indeed, as the battalion came up over a thousand bayonets, in ten strong companies, no regiment could look better, for Major Dumble had not had time yet to spoil it. But alas for human aspirations! It was the major's duty, after passing the saluting-flag, to recover his sword, and then, wheeling sharp round, to canter gracefully up to the eminent personage and remain in attendance on him till the battalion had marched past. And that worthy officer did his best to accomplish the manœuvre, albeit unaccustomed to equestrian exercise. Grasping his horse's mane firmly with the left hand, at the appointed moment he boldly struck his right spur into the animal, and pulled the right rein smartly. Too smartly, indeed; for the charger, unaccustomed to such decided treatment from his master, gave an unwieldy plunge, which nearly unseated its rider, and

turning sharp round in face of the advancing grenadier company, commenced backing steadily with its stern down and its nose up in the air. In vain Major Dumble, his left hand still holding by the friendly mane, tried by tugging at the right rein to complete the circle, and so front once more the proper way—the advancing line was on him before he could escape. The grenadiers before him began marking time; the flanks of the company continued to move on; the noble line became a curve, and the confusion thus created in the leading company spread in a few seconds from front to rear. The brigadier, flushing with rage, trotted into the fray to give some angry orders; the staff laughed, the eminent personage smiled; but at this critical point a rescue came in the person of the major's native groom, who, hovering with the rest of his fraternity in rear of the spectators, was descried by Dr Grumbull, the surgeon of the 76th, who happened to be among the lookers-on, and was told by him to go to his master's help. This worthy, hurrying to the front, barefooted, and horse-flapper in hand, by dint of gentle coaxing, patting the horse on the neck, and calling it his son and other terms of endearment in the ver-

nacular, succeeded in leading it to the rear, but not until the whole battalion had been covered with confusion. And as poor Yorke passed by unobserved at the head of the light company, for all eyes were now turned away, he had just time to notice that even Miss Cunningham was smiling and looking up towards Colonel Falkland, as if asking for information, while he, leaning towards her, was evidently explaining what had happened.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE eminent personage while in camp at Mustaphabad gave, as in duty bound, a succession of dinner-parties, so arranged that during his brief halt every member of the local society was invited in turn ; and to York the supreme good fortune happened of being invited for the same evening as the commissioner and his daughter. On any other occasion he would have been duly impressed with the magnificence of the reception-tent, so spacious that thirty or forty guests seemed quite lost in it, and the easy bearing of the staff officers who were present, and who, marching with his Excellency's camp, treated the entertainment quite as a matter of course. And at another time he would have felt nervous when led up by the aide-de-camp on the duty to be introduced to the eminent personage. But on this occasion all these distractions had no

effect on him, for standing by the eminent personage, and in conversation with him, was the object of his thoughts and day-dreams. And when, after his Excellency had shaken hands affably, Miss Cunningham, as he passed on, greeted him with her usual kindness, and held out her hand, the young fellow hardly knew what he was about; and as he found his way to a corner of the tent, the sudden joy which had possessed him gave way to a revulsion of feeling bordering on despair, as he thought how clumsily he had responded to the sweet condescension. That little hand, he thought, which he would have liked reverentially to raise to his lips, he had shaken—awkward blockhead that he was—no more gracefully than if it had belonged to any other lady—the brigadier's wife, for example.

That lady's name had hardly occurred to him when he heard her voice proceeding from an ottoman behind him.

“Oh yes, a very sweet girl indeed, but quite unsophisticated, and does such very funny things. You know it is always etiquette after being introduced to his Excellency to pass on and not stand near him. You see even I, who

am the senior lady here, have come and sat down here just as a subaltern's wife might do. Of course it's different in my case, because, as his Excellency will have to take me in to dinner, I shall be able to talk to him all the time; but still there is a natural delicacy of feeling which ought to teach people how to behave on these occasions—don't you think so?"

But as she said this, a dreadful doubt crept over the worthy lady's mind that perhaps, after all, his Excellency might be contemplating a *coup d'état*, and would carry off Miss Cunningham as a partner for dinner, leaving her, the brigadier's lady, neglected on the sofa to follow. Or could it be intended that Mrs Geeowe, the military secretary's lady, then sitting beside her, should be the favoured person? True, a colonel ranked after a brigadier; but still the military secretary was a very great person, and such mistakes had sometimes been made. In the agony of mind caused by these doubts, the good lady became conscious of Yorke's presence standing in front of her, and called him to her aid.

"Oh, Mr Yorke, is that you? How do you do? You *are* lucky, indeed, to be invited here so soon, with all the bigwigs. Just tell the



A.D.C. I want to speak to him—will you? Captain Sammys I mean—that's him standing there;" and suiting the action to the word, Mrs Polwheedle began making a series of telegraphic signals with her fan, until, succeeding in catching the captain's eye, that gentleman crossed the tent at once, holding a paper in his hand, in which he was jotting down the names of the guests, preparatory to marshalling them in pairs.

"Oh, Captain Sammys, I just want to say that if you require any assistance about the names and order of the ladies, pray command my services. It must be so puzzling to meet such a number of strangers at every station, and especially at a large station like this, a first-class brigade, you know."

"Oh—ah—well, it is," said the captain; "we do make mistakes sometimes; nice little bones of contention thrown among the natives for them to squabble over after we have gone; gives them something to talk about at any rate."

"Oh, but we don't want any bones of contention here," replied the lady, hardly knowing whether or not to be offended at the metaphor; "it's so easy to prevent it if you only ask the

proper people for information. I wanted the brigadier to have a list of all the ladies in the station made out in order of seniority, and kept at the brigade office. Now the commissioner's wife would have been senior to me, you know, only he's not married ; and of course Miss Cunningham, she doesn't count in these matters. Then Colonel M'Luckie is senior to Colonel Glumme—that's Mrs M'Luckie, the little pale thing talking to the commissioner—you wouldn't think it, for Colonel Glumme is ever so much older, and M'Luckie is only a regimental major, and they are both brevets of '54, but M'Luckie was senior as lieutenant-colonel."

"Thank you very much. I'm sure you have made it all as clear as daylight ; but it's too late now, I'm afraid, to alter my list, for I should get into a hopeless muddle. You'll go in to dinner with his Excellency, and I must pair off the others the best way I can."

"I am sure you will manage very well," said the lady, a beaming smile succeeding the look of anxiety which had overspread her ample face ; "you gentlemen of the staff are so clever."

Yorke, of course, went in to dinner, which was served in an adjoining tent, with the crowd of

gentlemen to whose share no ladies fell, as became a subaltern ; but it was his good fortune to sit nearly opposite to Miss Cunningham, who was handed in by a colonel on the staff,—and having nobody in particular to talk to, he occupied himself pleasantly enough in watching her furtively. The white ball-dress seemed perfect ; but surely this rich dinner-dress was even more becoming. Was there ever seen so radiant and gracious a queen of beauty before ? Why does not everybody in the room fall down and do homage ? The colonel, happily, was a married man, so there was no cause for jealousy ; but an uneasy doubt crossed his mind—what if his Excellency were to fall in love with her, and make her an offer ? He was a bachelor, and not much over sixty. Would she be able to withstand the temptation of the position in favour of a humble subaltern ? But just then, Miss Cunningham looking round suddenly, their eyes met, and she gave him an arch look, as if recognising a friend among strangers, which drove doubts and fears out of his head for the time. And after dinner, when the company returned to the drawing-room tent, he ventured to find his way to where she was sitting, and exchanged a few words, which

sent him home with bounding heart and excited brain.

And yet there was not much in the conversation itself to turn a young fellow's head.

"I felt so sorry for your regiment at the review yesterday," she said, "just as it was coming in front, and looking so well. It was your colonel's fault, wasn't it? He got in the way, or did something ridiculous, did he not?"

"Major Dumble commands our regiment; of course it's the same thing as if he were a colonel." Angry though he was with the stupid old man, he could not be so disloyal to his commanding officer as to run him down in public, even in speaking to Miss Cunningham.

The young lady understood the implied rebuke, and at once continued, "I am very sorry for making such a blunder, and quite deserve to be scolded for it; but you see, I am so ignorant of military etiquette."

"Deserved!" cried the young fellow; "to think that I should have the presumption to say that anything you said or did was not perfect."

"Yes," she said, laughing, "but it was very far from being perfect; but there is so much

tittle-tattle in the world, that it is hard not to fall into the way of talking it now and then ; don't you think so ? ”

At this moment Colonel Falkland came up to know if she was ready to go, and Miss Cunningham rose at once.

“ I didn't quite mean that, Olivia ; your father is anxious to be off as soon as he can, and sent me to ask you to be ready ; but you must wait till Mrs Polwheedle sets the example of rising, or you would give mortal offence.”

“ There, you see,” said she, turning towards Yorke laughingly — “ another breach of etiquette ! ”

“ Good heavens ! ” thought the youngster, “ what bliss to have a private understanding set up already ! and this is hardly more than the third time I have spoken to her.”

Mrs Polwheedle, however, was in no hurry to leave, for she was again in conversation with the eminent personage. “ I hear that your Excellency is going to march to Banglepore. I am so pleased to think that my son will have an opportunity of coming under your Excellency's notice.”

“ Your son, Mrs Polwheedle ? ” said his Ex-

cellency ; “ why, I understood the brigadier here to tell me that he had no——”

“ Oh no, not his son,” said the lady, tapping the brigadier on the arm with her fan ; “ my son by the late Captain Jones of the 10th Fusiliers —my first husband, you know — Lieutenant Jones, of the Banglepore Rangers, as promising a young officer as there is in the army, I can assure your Excellency. He has passed in the language ; and I am sure your Excellency will find him deserving of any favour you may be pleased to show him.”

## CHAPTER VII.

As Yorke rode home after the dinner-party to his bungalow at the other end of the station, smoking his cigar and reviewing the events of the evening, he felt for the time an elation which he had never before experienced. Miss Cunningham, he thought, must surely now understand my feelings. True, I have not said a word which could be taken to mean distinctly what I long to express ; but I could not, if I would, disguise the passion I feel. She must see that I worship the very ground she treads on ; and, seeing that, she is too noble to trifle with my love. She would have discouraged me ere this if it had been displeasing to her. There would be no such kind greetings if she thought my homage unworthy. But then what, after all, has passed between us that I should dare to build any hopes upon it ? We have not spoken more

than half-a-dozen times, and only a few words at a time ; what is this to build a romance upon ? And what am I, with no good looks worth speaking of, no money, no position, to hope to win this noble woman, so beautiful, so accomplished, so well placed ? I may know a little more than other fellows about some things, but I have given her no opportunity to find this out ; a donkey's braying were scarcely more inane than my conversation whenever I have been talking to her. Yet, after all, to be sure, women don't choose men for their good looks or their wit. There is Turtell of the 80th N.I., certainly not much to look at, and about as stupid a fellow as there is in the army, yet he found a pretty woman to fall in love with him, and one with ten times his brains. Look at Grumbull, too, our doctor ; what little chance the climate leaves a fellow, will be lost if he gets into his hands. And yet if he were a perfect Galen, Mrs Grumbull could not have a higher opinion of him ; and she is a clever woman enough. No ; there is no accounting for tastes, as Jerry would say ; if only she chooses to fancy a penniless sub, neither face nor empty purse need be against me ; and as for fortune, why, after all, every man in India starts



in the race of life from "scratch." Lawrence and Outram were once penniless subs, and with no better prospects than I have; and something tells me that if I do ever get a chance, I too shall be able to turn it to good account.

But then, again, whispered conscience, what are your chances in the race you are now running? You may be right in thinking that women throw away their hearts at random, but there must be opportunity — companionship — the means of meeting. Here are you, only a few miles off, 'tis true, but what are your chances and opportunities? A few stray words at a ball or dinner-party. What do you know of her inner life, and thoughts, and feelings? What chance have you, you awkward, shy gowk, of pushing yourself forward, and making the most of such small chances as offer themselves? And do you suppose that the prize will remain unwon for ever, or for long? Wake up from your trance of folly, young dreamer that you are.

But no—he argues again. Love needs no rules of time and opportunity. Has not my poor mother often said that she fell in love at first sight with my father, and that they were engaged to be married before they had known

each other a week ? And is it true that we are even now common acquaintances ? Does she greet other men as she greets me ? And then, as a vision came up before the young man of a life to be spent in companionship with the woman he loved, with no need to long and look for scanty interviews, a constant presence of her beauty, those eyes always looking into his, his awe at speaking to her exchanged for perfect trust, to have the sympathy of her noble heart to urge him onwards in his aims for a high career—as the young man, pacing to and fro along the gravel path in front of his little dwelling, conjured up this picture of a heaven on earth, his step under the excitement became so loud as to arouse his brother subaltern from sleep.

“I say, old fellow,” said Spragge, rising on his elbow in bed and looking at his chum through the open door, “you ain’t paid for doing watchman, you know. You might let a fellow go to sleep, I think. We’ve got a parade at gunfire.”

Thus rebuked, York retired to his own room, but only to toss about on his bed, recalling time after time the record of each word Miss Cunningham had spoken to him, and picturing incoherent

visions for the future, till summoned to rise again by the sound of the morning gun.

The next opportunity for meeting the young lady happened a day or two afterwards, on the occasion of the brigadier's half-yearly inspection of the Hussars. Alas! it was only an opportunity from which nothing came. Riding to the parade-ground on the morning in question, Yorke was in time to see the regiment drawn up in line awaiting the brigadier's arrival, himself one of the first spectators on the ground. But the inspection was half over before, straining his eyes across the plain in the direction of the city, he was at last rewarded for his patience. This time only two persons could be seen cantering towards the scene, who as they came nearer were made out to be Miss Cunningham and Colonel Falkland. They did not, however, join the other spectators in attendance on the brigadier, but pulled up their horses at some distance off, whence they stood watching the manoeuvres of the regiment. Yorke sat irresolute for some time, watching the pair—the colonel's upright figure on his powerful horse, the graceful outline of the young lady as her body swayed with every movement of her high-bred Arab, which,

excited by the clatter of the dragoons, was pawing the ground and tossing its little head ; and, as the two figures stood out in clear relief against the plain, he could not help thinking what a fitting protector the soldier-like colonel made to his gentle godchild. At last he made bold to join them, a bold movement indeed, involving his complete separation from the group of spectators, and committing himself alone to the naked plain, crossing the gap too at a foot-pace, for to ride faster would have attracted attention. But just as he was approaching the lady and her companion, whose heads were turned the other way, they set off in a gallop after the regiment, now executing a rapid change of front. Yorke's first impulse was to follow in pursuit, but he was restrained by a sense of the absurd figure he would cut, in full uniform, mounted on a diminutive pony, and by a doubt whether the pony could go fast enough to overtake them, and of the undignified appearance he would present if he did come up with them, looked down upon especially by Colonel Falkland from the height of his big horse. Thus thinking, the youngster pulled up, and wanting self-possession to enable him to rejoin the other lookers-on,

remained by himself on the plain, fancying that everybody was noticing his discomfiture. In reality everybody was watching the Hussars moving rapidly to and fro (for Colonel Tartar always went the pace, and was carrying out to the full his subaltern's promise that the inspection would be something of a kind to amuse the ladies); and so Yorke's little expedition passed unobserved.

The inspection over, and the regiment being formed up in three sides of a square, the brigadier addressed some valedictory remarks to it which Colonel Tartar received on the point of his sword, and then rode slowly off the ground. The spectators now began to disperse, making their way across the plain in the direction of their respective lines, and Yorke was just about to ride up to Miss Cunningham, when Colonel Tartar, making over his regiment to Major Winge, cantered up to where she and Colonel Falkland were standing. Yorke again pulled up, watching the party as they moved slowly away in the direction of the Residency, the little colonel with his legs stuck out, leaning over towards Miss Cunningham on his left, gesticulating with the right hand as if explaining the move-

ments of the day. Yorke felt that his pony would ill compare with the other's high-caste Arab, as it stepped proudly along, excited by the exercise, and tossing its head as if enjoying the rattle of its caparisons. And yet, thought the youngster, bitterly, I am as good as he, for all that he is a colonel of hussars, and I am only a subaltern of native infantry, and I would prove it if I only had a chance. Still, what chance shall I have against him if he enters the lists? She says she thinks there is no profession like the army; what more natural than that she should be dazzled with his medals, and his colonelcy, and his money? He is a dapper little fellow too, it must be confessed, and knows how to sit a horse. He is evidently going on to the Residency to breakfast, lucky chap. But no; Colonel Tartar, after accompanying the other two for a few hundred yards, turned back, and they set off at speed, for the sun was now getting hot; whereupon Yorke turned too and cantered home. But his faithful pony was now an object of contempt, and that very morning he took advantage of the arrival of an itinerant horse-merchant to purchase a more dignified mount. A high-caste Arab would

alone have satisfied his aspirations, but as this meant running hopelessly into debt, he was fain to be content with a well-looking animal with strong legs and uncertain pedigree, although having some other good points, for which the dealer took the pony in exchange and a promissory-note for a sum which would make a formidable inroad on the young man's slender income; but he was just now in a reckless mood. "Poor little Jerry," said he, as he took the saddle off the pony named after his chum, "it seems a shame to turn you adrift after you have done your work, doesn't it? You ain't much to look at, but you know how to go, and you have taught me to ride at any rate. Many is the battle we have had to see who should be master—haven't we, you little beggar?" So saying, he gave the pony a farewell pat—to which the honest beast responded by putting back his ears as if preparatory to a bite or a kick, whichever might come readiest—and saddling his new purchase, rode it home.

The next day or two were passed mainly in looking after the new horse, trying its paces, getting it shod properly, and teaching it to jump over a hurdle rigged up in the compound; pro-

ceedings in which Yorke's chum took as much interest as himself—for the arrival of a new horse is a great event in the household of a native infantry subaltern; and the two young men might be seen for the greater part of the day before the shed in a corner of their compound which did duty for a stable, superintending the grooming operations. Spragge might have grown jealous on comparing the good-looking grey with the insignificant occupant of the next stall that owned him as master, but that jealousy did not enter into Jerry's composition. "English blood there, and Arab too, I'll bet anything," said the young critic for the hundredth time, surveying the new purchase with admiration; "by Jove! I only wish I was out of debt, I'd buy a horse too. I say, old fellow, you must give me a mount on him sometimes."

The new horse being somewhat raw to the bit, and scarcely in form for appearance on the Mall, Yorke took him for exercise at first to a piece of ragged ground in rear of the cantonments, which being in the vicinity of the station slaughter-houses afforded perfect seclusion, while a number of small ravines running down to the river



offered a variety of broken ground well adapted for breaking in a young horse.

Just as he was returning from this region one evening about dusk, Yorke heard the footstep of a horse coming up behind, and Falkland, cantering past on his Irish mare, on perceiving him pulled up alongside.

The colonel explained that he had been for a ride across country; he did not get enough exercise at the Residency, he said, with merely a morning canter. "But what brings you to these unsavoury parts," he asked, "while all the gay world of Mustaphabad are listening to the band?"

Yorke replied that he was breaking in a new horse, and teaching him to jump ditches.

"A new purchase?" said the colonel, eyeing the horse, "and a very nice-looking one too—country bred, I presume, but with some good blood in him evidently. So you are teaching him to jump? and a very proper thing too. Do you think he could manage this?" And so saying, the colonel turned to one side, and pressing his mare, put her at a small ravine. It was no great thing for the big mare, but a respectable jump for the little country-bred, which,

however, Yorke, following the lead, sent across in good style.

“Very well done,” said the colonel; “you have a good nag there, and know how to ride him. You ought to enter him for the coming steeplechase.”

Yorke thought he was joking; the idea of a country-bred running in a race of any sort, was like entering a hack for a flat race in England.

The colonel said he was quite in earnest. It was not a matter of speed or blood. “It is astonishing how few horses in this country can jump; want of practice, I suppose. If any horse succeeds in getting round the course, the chances are it will win, and your horse has some good blood in him, and some capital points for a fencer; but here we are in cantonments. Good evening. I must push on, or I shall be late for dinner;” and the colonel rode off.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day, while Yorke and his chum were at breakfast, the tramp of a horse's feet was heard on the gravel outside, and looking out the young men descried before the door a horseman of the Nawab's very irregular cavalry, a body which under treaty engagements furnished orderlies for duty at the Residency. The rider had evidently come from thence, for he produced a small note from the folds of his waistcloth, which he delivered to the servant who was sitting in the veranda.

"A ticket for soup, by all that's powerful!" cried Spragge. "Well, I thought it was about time for the commissioner to do the civil. Two distinguished officers like us are not to be treated with neglect even by a bloated civilian. It's directed to you, Arty," he continued, throwing the note across the table, "and from the lovely

creature herself. You'd better keep it next your heart, only open it first, my boy, and let's know what's up."

Had Spragge been more observant he would have noticed the blush and confusion of his companion. It was the first letter he had ever received from Miss Cunningham; the first time, indeed, that he had ever seen her handwriting.

He disguised his emotion, however, and rebuked his companion. "I wish you would have a little sense for once in your life, Spragge," he said pettishly, calling that young officer by his surname, "and keep your foolish jokes for fit subjects."

"Oh! that's the line, is it?" replied the imperturbable Jerry; "some things are not to be talked about, or else we cut up rough, do we? with our Spragges and our Yorkes? We shall be having coffee and pistols, next, I suppose? All right, old fellow; you've only got to give me the office, you know, and I'm mum. Still you haven't told us yet what the letter is about; come, out with it! ticket for soup? or a hop?"

Yorke replied that it was an invitation to dinner for the next day but one.

"And me left out," cried Jerry; "well, that is

a shame, considering we both called on the same day. You have been making play since to any extent, of course; still there's a want of consideration about the thing; if we had both been asked on the same night, we might have taken Nubbee Buksh's buggy between us."

"Consideration!" said Yorke, loftily. "As if Miss Cunningham would be likely to think about such details as the small economies of a subaltern's *ménage*."

"*Ménage*, eh? small economies, eh? We are coming it strong, and no mistake. What's the last book we got this out of? This comes of our Shakespeares and our Homers. Beg pardon, old fellow," he added, apologetically, seeing that Yorke was looking angrily towards him; "but don't you think you'd better answer the note, and not keep the sowar waiting? I'll take myself off and have a pipe in the stable, and then perhaps when I come back Richard will be himself again."

How the young man, left alone, discovered that there was no paper or ink in the bungalow fit to write his reply upon, and sent down to the Europe shop for a packet of the best creamlaid, and a bottle of fresh ink, the orderly waiting the

while, dismounted, holding his horse under the shade of a tree ; how, when the paper and ink arrived, he spoilt half-a-dozen sheets before his answer was ready, in doubt whether to say " My dear Miss Cunningham," or only " Dear Miss Cunningham,"—need not be told ; nor that he did as a fact deposit the note about his person, taking it out a dozen times in the day to read the contents. Yet they were not of much import, for the note merely ran thus :—

" DEAR MR YORKE,—Will you give us the pleasure of your company to dinner on Thursday at half-past seven ?—Believe me, yours very truly,  
OLIVIA CUNNINGHAM."

Needs not be said that Yorke engaged Nubbee Buksh's buggy for the Thursday evening, nor that, although until now he had never thought much about dress, he made as elaborate a toilet for the occasion as the conditions of undress uniform permitted ; but not the less did he feel shy and nervous as he entered the large drawing-room at the Residency, although his heart bounded within him at the cordial greeting of the hostess, as she advanced from the group of

guests to meet him, and held out her hand with a smile and look of pleasure which sent the young fellow into raptures.

There were only twelve persons in all, including the brigadier and Mrs Polwheedle, and the dinner was served at a round table, permitting of general conversation, and to Yorke a full view of Miss Cunningham in a perfectly enchanting demi-toilet. Certainly, he thought it is even more becoming than the ball-dress, or the more costly apparel worn at his excellency's party. It is the same picture, of course, that sets off any framing—the lovely face, the graceful figure, and the noble folds of rich brown hair.

The conversation turned to the subject then occupying all the dinner-tables in India, the misconduct of a guard of sepoy's at Barrackpore.

"For my part," said Mrs Polwheedle, "I think the whole regiment ought to have been hanged, the rascally fellows! to stand by and see their officer wounded in that way. Disbanding was too good for them."

"But the whole regiment didn't see the thing done," observed the commissioner.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," she replied; "they were all sepoy's together, and sepoy's always

stick by each other, with their nonsense about caste, and their not doing this or doing that. I have no patience with them."

"My dear," said the brigadier, who sat opposite, in a voice of mild reproach, "you forget that your husband is a sepoy officer."

"No, I don't," replied the lady; "but I wasn't always the wife of a native infantry officer, you know; and I have my feelings on this point. Besides, I don't consider that you belong to the native army now that you are a brigadier; you command Europeans and natives too, so you ought to be impartial."

"For my part," observed Major Winge of the Hussars, who was one of the company, "I should like to see every black regiment cut down to half its present strength, and a dozen more British regiments sent out."

"Native infantry regiments, I suppose you mean?" interposed Colonel Falkland.

"Oh, of course," replied the other, "they *are* dark; same thing, you know."

"The same thing, perhaps, but not the same name; we will keep to the official designation, with your permission, if the thing is to be discussed at all."



“By all means, if you like,” returned the major; “no offence was meant.”

“You did not mean to be offensive of course,” said the colonel.

And so the conversation dropped, or rather a turn was given to it by the commissioner, who asked Major Winge across the table if his regiment had many horses entered for the coming races.

While it was going on, Yorke felt his face flush at the implied insult to his branch of the service. A feeling of bashfulness, however, kept him silent at first, and then just as he was about at last to burst out, Colonel Falkland had stepped in to the rescue.

That the offensive attack should have been properly put down was satisfactory, but there now succeeded to the indignation a feeling of shame that Miss Cunningham should have been witness of the scene. What must she think of military men, if they were ready to deal in such braggart ways across a dinner-table, till even Falkland, a man who seemed placed above such things by standing and natural dignity, was drawn into the squabble? It was all that horrid Mrs Polwheedle’s doing, and it was just the

same on the day of his first call. How could this gentle and refined creature tolerate her society? Even if the commissioner was too good-natured to take care of his daughter in that respect, surely her godfather might interpose to shield her from such vulgarising contact.

The person referred to, who sat next to him, seemed to be reading his thoughts, for he interrupted the current of them by remarking in an undertone: "I am afraid our hostess will think some of us have been taking our wine before dinner instead of at the proper time. It is a sad world this," he added with a smile; "shut one's self out as we may from all that is disagreeable, still the unpleasant will obtrude itself sometimes. The worst of it is that I am afraid the gentleman opposite had only too much truth on his side."

"Do you really think, sir," asked the youngster, eagerly, "that the native army is not to be trusted?"

"I think that it might be reduced with great advantage, and the proportion of European troops brought up again to what it was when I first entered the service."

"Then do you really think that there is any mischief brewing in the native army?"

"It is a mercenary army," replied the colonel, "and it is an army which has nothing to do at present, two conditions which don't go well together. Of course you may keep mercenary troops in order by discipline; but we have merely the semblance of discipline left now. It would not need a very violent shake, I fear, to bring the military fabric to pieces, or at any rate to put it grievously out of joint."

"But surely there is nothing to show that things are worse now than they have been for the last fifty years? There have been repeated instances of misconduct before, but the army has outlived them. And in the present instance, it seems to have been effectually put down. Why should things be worse now than at any time before?"

"Of course there is a great deal to be said on the optimist side. The men have all their pensions to look to, and then it is not likely that the Hindoos and Mahomedans would ever pull together, if either party were to fall out with their masters. And I suppose luck will befriend us in the future as it has in the past. Still a little tighter discipline and a few more European troops would not be bad precautions. But of

course," said the colonel, turning towards him with a smile, "I don't want these doubts to go any further. We must put a good face on matters, whatever we may think about them."

"But surely," said York, "holding these views, it would be proper for you at least to urge them on the Government."

"Who? I? Oh no; that would be of no use. The headquarter people would pooh-pooh the advice of an alarmist civilian, as they would call me, and would say that they have as good opportunities for judging of these matters as he has, which is quite true, though whether they make use of them is another matter."

After dinner, as soon as the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, Miss Cunningham asked Captain Sparrow, who was of the party, to sing—which, after a little pressing, he consented to do, the lady accompanying him. Captain Sparrow had a tenor voice, which might have been pronounced sweet in quality, only that there was very little of it to judge by, and sang airs from the Italian Opera of the more sentimental kind, delivered with a sort of caricature of stage manner, the retardations extra slow, the pathos extra pathetic. As he sang, with one hand rest-

ing on the piano and the other on his hip—his hair parted down the middle, a loosely-tied black ribbon under his turned-down collar, his eyes cast down, and face expressing all the pathos which could not find utterance through the voice, while the fair accompanist placidly followed all the changes of time in the performance—Yorke felt as by instinct that although she was perfectly grave and polite, and there was no trace of irony in her thanks to the singer when the performance was concluded, any remaining fear of rivalry in that quarter might now safely be dismissed.

“And now, Miss Cunningham, won’t you sing something yourself,” said the captain, “especially after I have set you so good an example? I am sure you will be in good voice to-night. There is something in the air conducive to song. I felt it myself.”

Just then Yorke came up, and Sparrow moved off, to receive the thanks of the rest of the company.

“Are you fond of music, Mr Yorke?” asked the lady.

“I should like above everything to hear you sing,” replied the young fellow.

"How can you tell you will not be disappointed when you hear me?" she said, with a laugh and slight blush, as she stooped to turn over the loose pieces of music on the stand.

"No, no," rejoined the young man with ardour; "there is no doubt about it. Heaven gave you a sweet voice, and it gave you"—every other charm, he was going to add; but checking himself, continued, "besides, you must know that your fame has preceded you."

Miss Cunningham said nothing in reply, but looking downwards seated herself at the instrument and began to sing. Nor had rumour exaggerated her powers. She sang with the taste and finish given by Italian teaching, while her voice was like her speaking voice, low and rich, and expressing a sort of unconscious pathos, as if asking what romantic fate awaited its possessor in the future.

She sang two songs, the young lover standing by entranced, turning over the pages; one Italian, full of repressed passion—one German, kindling subtle, undefinable emotions. Then at his request she sang a third time; after which, some of the guests who had meanwhile been scattered about the room came up to express their

thanks. But presently the two were left alone again, for the room was a very large one, and the young lady still sitting on the music-stool turned round.

"Do you really think," said she, "that the sepoys are not to be trusted? Perhaps I ought not to ask such a question from you; but your men, now, they look such simple honest fellows, and papa seems to have the most perfect confidence in them."

"I would answer for them with my life," replied the young man, earnestly.

"I like to hear you speak like that," said the young lady, with animation; "there is something to my mind quite revolting in discussing the character and loyalty of our soldiers in this way, whether their faces are light or dark."

As she looked up at him with a gleam of admiration in her dark eyes, the young man felt ready to throw himself at her feet in a transport of love. For him to worship her was only natural; but that she should regard him as worthy of respect seemed altogether beyond his deserts, so infinitely above himself did she always seem to be. Something of this may have appeared in his look of devotion, for she blushed

slightly, and turned away her head, and then changing the conversation said, "When is the inspection of your regiment to take place?"

"On Saturday—shall you come to see it?" And the young man hung on her answer as if his very life depended on it.

"I will come, if I possibly can. Papa has not been very well lately, and is often disinclined to ride of a morning; but if Colonel Falkland is still with us, I am sure he will escort me."

"Is Colonel Falkland going away?"

"His month's leave comes to an end to-morrow; but he hopes to get it extended. I don't quite understand the arrangement; it appears there are various contingencies involved, but he expects to hear how the matter is settled early in the morning."

Presently she added, "Colonel Falkland says you ought to be in the cavalry—the irregular cavalry I think he called it—because you are such a good rider."

"Colonel Falkland's praise of any one is valuable, but he seems always to speak kindly of everybody."

"Ah, then I see you have found out his generous nature, and think as highly of him as every



one seems to do. I am so glad of that," said Miss Cunningham, warmly.

"Think highly of him? why, he is one of the finest fellows in the army. I always knew he was extremely popular, too, and now I have met him I can understand why he is. What a pity it is that he should be thrown away in civil employ, instead of being at the head of the army, or something of the sort!"

And the two cast their looks in the direction of the person spoken of, a middle-aged, not particularly handsome, and not well-dressed man, standing in another part of the room.

Then she asked him if he was going to take a part in the coming races; and he replied that he was going to enter a young horse he had just bought, for the steeplechase. Had he still possessed only his old pony Jerry, he would in his present state of infatuation have committed himself to entering that useful but diminutive animal.

Miss Cunningham asked whether steeplechase-riding was not a very dangerous thing; and Yorke laughingly replied that there was not much danger to be met with in the army nowadays, either in that or any other way; the only

danger he ran was of making himself ridiculous by being nowhere in the race.

Here the conversation was interrupted ; and, save at parting, when he held her slender hand for a moment in his, Yorke had no opportunity of again speaking to the young lady. But as he drove himself home in the still clear night, he rehearsed the scene of the evening over and over again, dwelling on each gracious look, each radiant smile, calling up each changing expression of the sweet face—now gracious, now arch—anon, when in repose, as he thought, pensive. Surely he could not be wrong in thinking both that she understood his devotion, and was not unprepared to reward it. To no one else, he felt sure, did she appear so tender and gracious. Even to her father she seemed hardly more so. To other persons, as he could not help persuading himself, her bearing, if gentle, was somewhat reserved and distant. Only to himself and Falkland was there shown this confidential manner ; but then Falkland was an old friend, and her godfather—old enough indeed to be her father. Nevertheless, uneasy doubts crossed the young man's mind, especially when he reached home, and surveying by the dim light of a single

candle the poverty of his little bungalow, contrasted it with the splendour of the Residency and the well-lit-up salon, in the vastness of which a dozen guests seemed almost lost, till his heart sank within him. How could he dare to hope to bring that splendid creature to such a lowly roof? Still less possible did it seem to raise himself from his present humble grade to a level with her condition and her father's just expectations. And what if, after all, she were really in ignorance of his feelings, and he merely another Malvolio fancying his Countess was in love with him, as much deceived and every whit as foolish? Thus, alternate hopes and fears coursing each other through his mind, the young man paced restlessly the gravel walk before his bungalow—his usual nightly occupation now—but taking care not to wake his chum, till, tired out in mind and body, he sought his room and found at last the sound sleep of youth and health.

## CHAPTER IX.

Two days afterwards took place the inspection of the 76th. In the monotony of an Indian cantonment, even the inspection of a native infantry regiment creates a certain amount of excitement; and before sunrise a small group of equestrians were assembled on the parade to witness the spectacle. The regiment itself had been under arms before daylight, and the officers fell in soon afterwards, while Major Dumble—who, with a card of the manœuvres in his hand which had been prepared for him by the adjutant, was going through them in his head for the last time—sat his old trooper with a look of anxious desperation as the fatal moment approached. For now the brigadier might be seen riding at a foot-pace on his grey cob towards the line, attended by his brigade-major and the assistant quartermaster-general, also by Colonel Tartar, who had

joined him on his way past the Hussar parade. The brigadier and his staff were in blue coats and cocked-hats, all the other military lookers-on in full uniform except Colonel Tartar, who being a colonel of Hussars might be considered to be above rule, and indeed sat his Arab pony with an air of easy superiority, as if quite aware of the amount of condescension involved in his coming at all. The ceremony is now about to begin, and Yorke's heart leaps up at seeing the well-known objects advancing rapidly out of the plain from the direction of the Residency, as he had seen them come on former occasions, soon to be made out clearly as Colonel Falkland and Miss Cunningham, who canter up and join the group of visitors just as the brigadier arrives in front of the line. Yorke has just time to notice with a pang of jealousy that Colonel Tartar is turning aside to join the new-comers, when the regiment is called to attention, and as the brigadier advances towards it, a general salute is ordered; after which Major Dumble, by dint of kicking his horse and shaking its rein, persuades it to advance a few paces, and hands the brigadier a "present state" of the regiment. The latter passes over the want of style in the major's

approach, riding not being laid down in the infantry regulations or a strong point personally, but reserves himself for criticism on the handling of the battalion, an art in which he deems himself to be an authority. And truly the battalion looks a goodly one to handle, over nine hundred and fifty bayonets mustering on the parade, carried by stalwart sepoy, well set up. And now begins the serious business of the morning. The salute delivered, the regiment breaking into open column of companies marches past in slow and quick time, a feat which, having been practised every morning for the previous six weeks, is performed fairly in automatic fashion, without giving Major Dumble an opportunity for interposing a mistake. "Do believe we shall pull the major through," whispers Poynter the adjutant to Brevet-major Passey, the senior captain, who was the other mounted officer. The "march past" over, the regiment is again formed into line and put through the time-honoured manual and platoon exercises by Major Passey, a feat to which he and the regiment are quite equal, Major Dumble the while glancing nervously at his card, and recalling for the last time the adjutant's lessons on the coming movements. The

first operation, a change of front, went all right; there was little for the commanding officer to do, and the leaders of companies knew their work and made no mistake. And the second movement promised well also. It was an advance by column of double companies from the centre; and Major Dumble, as he surveyed from the rear the companies stepping off and wheeling at due intervals with precision, felt his courage reviving, and began to hope that he should really get through the inspection.

But, alas! at this moment, just as the formation was completed, the brigadier called out to him in what was meant for a reassuring tone—"Very good indeed, Major Dumble—very good indeed; now suppose you form square. Don't you hear, sir?" he repeated in a louder voice—"form square."

Now a square was duly entered in the card of manœuvres, but then it was to come off later in the day, and when the regiment was halted in line. For such a change in the programme the major was altogether unprepared, and gazed in dumb anguish at the brigadier, and when the latter in still louder tones repeated his command, adding "Why don't you halt the leading divi-

sion, sir?" the unhappy major mistaking the word "leading" for "rear," called out in desperation, "Rear division, halt! right about face!"

The companies in question obeyed the order. The rest of the column continued marching on.

The major saw that he had made a blunder, but there was still time to retrieve it, although no time for reflection. Obeying the impulse of despair he gave the word to the centre companies to wheel inwards, and again the order was obeyed, the leading companies still pursuing their fatal march onwards; and although the adjutant at last took upon himself to stop them, the mischief was done. They had by this time advanced a long distance to the front. The centre companies had been brought to a halt by coming up against each other, and now stood face to face, the rear division meantime gazing backward into space, from which position our subaltern could witness the merriment of the spectators. The formation of the regiment in fact now resembled the capital letter I, but with the head and tail separated by a long interval from the body. Never had the Mustaphabad parade-ground witnessed such a spectacle.

Although not without a fellow-feeling for the



service from which he had risen, this was yet a proud moment for Brigadier Polwheedle. The inspection of the Hussars or the Horse Artillery was a thing to be done gently, and even deferentially, the brigadier indeed never feeling quite sure on such occasions that Colonel Tartar was not laughing at him the while, and executing manœuvres for his edification not laid down in the Queen's regulations ; but here he was master of the position, and felt every inch a brigadier. "Take your regiment home, sir," he called out in a loud voice to the miserable Dumble—"that is, if you know how to—and let me see it again as soon as it is fit to be inspected ;" and so saying, he turned the grey cob round and rode majestically away.

Whether Major Dumble would have been equal to the feat of taking the regiment home was never proved, for the extrication of it from its melancholy position was effected by the adjutant, the unhappy commandant sitting silent on his horse while the latter gave the needful orders. The operation completed, Major Passey, making the slightest possible salute with his sword to his commanding officer, said, "Shall I march the regiment back to the lines, major?"

"Please do, Passey," replied poor Dumble, meekly ; and so saying rode back alone to his own bungalow, whence he did not emerge for the rest of the day.

"Hang it," said Spragge, to a brother sub, after the regiment was broken off, as they mounted their ponies to ride to their bungalow, "we must buy old Dumble out, sharp. I can't stand being made a fool of in this way. How much do you think the old boy would take to go at once ? I'm game to borrow my share ; I'm so deep in the banks already that a trifle more won't make much difference."

"No good trying, my dear fellow," replied the other ; "the poor old major is in the banks himself : he can't retire with a wife and family at home to provide for. No, no ; we have got him fast for another six years at least, till he get the line step, and perhaps even longer."

"A jolly look-out for us," rejoined Spragge ; "well, I must positively take to passing in the language and getting a staff appointment. I'm blessed if I can stand this any longer. I wish I were a dab at languages and things like Yorke ; but I'll set to work at the black classics this very day." And Jerry kept his word so far as

to spend the whole of that morning spelling out the first chapter of the Baital Pachisi with the help of the regimental moonshee, but unfortunately his resolution did not carry him beyond the first day.

Major Dumble's fiasco was naturally the subject of conversation in more circles than one that morning. "Serves him right for an old stupid," said Mrs Polwheedle to Captain Buxey, whose buggy was drawn up next to that lady's carriage. "I told the brigadier the first day Dumble came to the station that I was sure he wasn't any good. The Government ought to get rid of such fellows. If he were in a Queen's regiment now, he'd have to go on half-pay; and serve him right, wouldn't it, colonel?" added the lady in a louder voice to Colonel Tartar, who was riding slowly past.

"Serve whom right, Mrs Polwheedle?" replied the colonel, stopping his horse, but without coming nearer to the carriage.

"Why, Major Dumble, to be sure. I was just saying to Captain Buxey that such *exposés* would never be allowed in the Queen's service, would they?"

"A little hard, though, on the regiment and

the officers, isn't it?" said Tartar, drily; "but beauty sometimes goes with a hard heart."

"Flatterer!" replied the lady, with a complacent smile on her comely face.

"There's such a thing as a service feeling, too, observed Captain Buxey after the Colonel had passed on. "I don't like to see Company's officers made fools of in public."

"Oh, as to that," said Mrs Polwheedle, "I don't regard Polwheedle in the same light as a regular Company's officer, now that he commands a station with troops of all kinds; besides, you know, I was brought up to think of the Queen's regulations before everything. In Captain Jones's regiment we used never to call on the ladies of Company's officers. Quite a society in ourselves we were. Of course as a brigadier's lady I show no preferences, but still I have my feelings."

As for Yorke, his first impulse was to hasten to the Residency to learn at least the worst, and with a faint hope at the bottom of his heart that Miss Cunningham might have some consolation to offer. A call there was due after the dinner-party, and it had been a struggle for the young man to put it off for so long. Accordingly Nub-

bee Buksh's buggy and horse were again put into requisition, and soon after breakfast he drove over to the Residency, full of a deep yearning, as he controlled the erratic movements of that wayward animal, to give some utterance to the feelings that oppressed him. Did she know of his passionate love for her, then surely any impulse to laugh at him or the regiment would be changed to a feeling of sympathy.

Alas! on driving under the great portico he was met by the announcement that the "door was shut," the Indian version of the more euphemistic "not at home;" and there was nothing left to Yorke but to return to cantonments, downcast and disappointed. Life seemed for the time an utter blank. There was no excuse left for paying another visit, and little chance of meeting the lady anywhere else. There only remained now the "steeplechase. In that, at least, he might hope to wipe out the ridicule thrown on the regiment and himself.

## CHAPTER X.

THE coming steeplechase was a novelty imported for the first time into the Mustaphabad annual race-meeting. That favourite station being situated in a sandy plain which extended in perfect flatness for many days' journey in every direction, covered at one season of the year with luxuriant corn in fields quite unenclosed, and separated by marks distinguishable only by the villagers, and for the rest a sandy desert dotted with villages and thinly sprinkled with acacia-trees—a country of this sort was not favourable for the development of hunting, and had witnessed hitherto no more lively sport than coursing. The race had been got up indeed mainly at the instance of a couple of sporting subalterns in another native infantry regiment, joint proprietors of an aged Australian mare, known to be sure at her fences if her legs would only hold

out; and it was to come off as the final event of the second day's meeting, Colonel Tartar having offered a cup for the winner in addition to the stakes.

The entries were comparatively numerous, considering that not many horses at the station had ever had the opportunity of being put at a jump, and that a rumour that Colonel Falkland meant to run his Irish mare had kept out several intending competitors, as nothing would have had a chance against her. And when the entries were closed, at the race-ordinary held at the subscription-rooms the evening before the meeting, no less than six entries were declared for this particular event. Lunge, the riding-master of the Hussars, had entered an old Cape horse reputed to have been good with the Meerut fox-hounds; Stride, of the Horse Artillery, a stud-bred horse, his second charger; Chupkin, of the Irregulars, a country-bred mare, usually ridden by his wife—if Mrs Chupkin would ride it herself, said the knowing ones, she would be sure to win—a feather-weight, and with nerve for anything; young Scurry, the moneyed man of the Hussars, a newly-purchased chestnut Arab, the handsomest charger in the regiment, but a trifle impetu-

ous; the confederates, Messrs Egan and M'Intyre of the 80th N.I., the Australian mare above referred to, which had arrived mysteriously at the station a few days before; the list being closed by our friend's horse.

Yorke had never been present at a race-ordinary before, his experience having been confined hitherto to what are known as single-corps stations, garrisoned by one regiment of native infantry, where race-meetings were unknown; and he felt a little nervous as he entered the barnlike assembly rooms where the meeting was held with fifty rupees in his pocket for the entrance-stakes. His announcement evidently took the company by surprise; for although the hurdles in his compound told a tale to his neighbours, his recent purchase had not attracted much attention, and the fact of his ownership of a horse of any sort was not generally known.

"It's not a tattoo race, young man," observed M'Intyre, who was standing by the little table at which Westropp of the Irregulars, the honorary secretary, was recording the entries; "ain't you making a mistake?"

"There's nothing against tats in the rules,"



said Westropp, before Yorke had time to speak ; “ you may enter a donkey if you like, M’Intyre ; ” whereat the laugh was turned against M’Intyre, and Yorke felt grateful to Westropp for coming to his help before a suitable repartee had occurred to himself.

The entries concluded, the company sat down to dinner, after which they proceeded to the lotteries, the serious business of the evening. Several other officers now dropped in, among them Colonel Tartar, with whose dignity it was hardly compatible to partake of a race-ordinary, but who patronised the races in an affable way, as became a man with a reputation in the shires and noted light-weight rider in his younger days, and indeed was not above employing the evening in making a little book. “ How do, Yorke ? ” said the little colonel, with a friendly nod ; “ so you have got something in for my cup. I suppose that’s the little horse Falkland was speaking about—a tidy jumper, he tells me ; well, I wish you all luck, but I am afraid I shan’t be able to back you this time.”

Proceedings were interrupted at first by an objection lodged against the confederates’ horse, it being a condition that all horses entered for the

cup should be *bond fide* the property of officers at the station ; while the known impecunious state of the partners, whose domestic embarrassments in connection with the local shopkeepers constituted the principal business at the monthly sittings of the Cantonment Small Cause Court, rendered it matter of question how they should have come by such a property. The production of their entrance-money in hard cash had indeed occasioned some little surprise ; but the objection was disposed of on Egan's producing a letter from the late owner, accepting the joint promissory-note of himself and M'Intyre at six months' date, for a sum, the amount of which was concealed from the referee by a dirty thumb placed over the figures, whereon the company proceeded to make out the lotteries. The drawing of these, with the interpolated betting, occupied a considerable time, Egan and M'Intyre both going into the work like millionaires ; while it was observable that, notwithstanding the doubt previously thrown upon their credit, no one declined to bet with these gentlemen, even Colonel Tartar booking more than one transaction of the kind. The steeplechase lottery came last. It was the only one to which Yorke subscribed, and as

there were fifty lots and only six horses, it was not surprising that he drew a blank. In the auction which followed the drawing, Scurry's horse was clearly declared the favourite, being bought in by the owner for thirty gold mohurs, while Lunge's fetched only fifteen ; the confederates' mare was purchased by her owners for ten, and Yorke's horse by Colonel Tartar for five. "Can't do much harm by losing twenty chicks," observed the colonel, in Anglo-Indian *argot*, as the lot was knocked down to him ; "and after all, there is a good deal of uncertainty about steeplechasing."

## CHAPTER XI.

NEXT morning was the first of the race-meeting, and Yorke, who had never seen any races in India, or indeed anywhere else, would fain have been present, but duty forbade. Devotion must have a final canter, and moreover Spragge had discovered, hard by a neighbouring village, a wall almost a facsimile of that put up on the course, stiffer if anything, but with a good take off. "The very thing to practise the little horse at; he'll do everything else all right enough, the game little beggar! but there is no saying how he might behave if he came across a new kind of jump for the first time. Nothing like practice." And accordingly, while all the rest of the station were driving down to the race-course, which was at the extreme end of the station, on the flank of the Native Cavalry parade, Yorke and Spragge (for the good-natured fellow

had given up the races to accompany his friend) cantered across the plain in the other direction in quest of the exemplar which the latter had discovered, a rare form of enclosure in those parts. In truth, in the early morning, with no hounds to follow or excitement of any sort, it looked a formidable thing to face. Yorke, however, did not stop to think, but cantered straight at it; and the little horse, feeling the rider's purpose in his firm hand and steady grip, swerved not to right or left, but cleared the wall without touching.

"Bravo!" called out Jerry to his friend on the other side; "four feet six, if it's an inch, and looks five, and that one on the course is barely four. Well done, again!" he cried, as Yorke, cantering back, took the wall a second time. "What a good-plucked little horse it is, to be sure, and he not fourteen three! If the pace does not get forced too much, but he has time to take his fences quietly, I don't believe there's one of them can come near him. Now then, Arty, pop him over just once more and back again, so that he may know what a mud wall is like when he sees it, and then that will be enough for the old boy." Which feat accom-

plished, and the grey having had his gallop in a circuit over the neighbouring fields of young corn, while Spragge looked on approvingly, the two young officers returned slowly home. "Oh, by Jove!" said Spragge, "I wish I weighed a stone less than you, Arty, then you'd have to let me ride instead of you; but these long legs of mine will never be of any use for racing," he continued, looking down ruefully at the members referred to, which indeed the diminutive pony he bestrode barely kept from touching the ground.

Yorke had the satisfaction of hearing casually at mess that evening that the commissioner and his daughter were not at the morning's races, but were expected to be present the next day.

At last came the eventful morning, with a sky cloudless as usual at that season of the year, and a pleasant fresh air, although it was the middle of February, so that overcoats and shawls came not amiss at first to the occupants of the grand stand. A few of the spectators were on horseback, being thus able to see the start for the short races, and by cutting across to come in at the finish; but the majority took up their places in the grand stand, sheltered by the roof

and by a clump of trees on one side from the rays of the rising sun. That spacious edifice, which could accommodate a hundred persons with ease, yet was pretty full on this occasion, was raised on pillars a few feet above the ground, with space underneath for the scales and for the servants engaged in making tea for the ladies. A small space on the left enclosed by hurdles was reserved as a paddock for the stewards and jockeys and for the saddling. Besides the greater part of the gentry, a considerable number of the European soldiers at the station were present, the men on foot, the serjeants on troopers ; there were also a sprinkling of sepoys in their white mufti, and some two or three hundred of the lower orders from the bazaar, camp-followers for the most part, attracted for the nonce by the news that the sahibs were going to have a new kind of race—all grave and stolid, and for the most part silent ; but it is not easy to be jovial at six in the morning. Yorke, his riding-dress concealed by a long overcoat belonging to his chum, rode down on the pony of the latter, who himself trudged on foot, the horse “Devotion,” led by the native groom, following, his tail cut square, his mane plaited, and covered by a regu-

lar suit of clothing on which a job-tailor had been at work for the past week seated on the floor of their veranda, the stuff having been bought from a local pedlar—the horse altogether, as Mr Spragge observed, “looking a regular bang-up racer, and as good as he looks.”

Yorke, leaving the groom to lead the horse up and down among the trees in the rear (Jerry rushing out every minute from the front to see that the operation was properly conducted), takes up his place at first in the enclosure, and leaning over the hurdle, looks up sideways at the front row of spectators in the stand. They are chiefly ladies, the gentlemen for the most part standing on the seats behind; but the one face he is in search of is not there, and he thinks with a sinking heart that the object for which he has made this venture has eluded him, when the sound of carriage-wheels is heard at the back of the stand, and Yorke can make out the heads of the commissioner's mounted orderlies. The view is otherwise interrupted by people and pillars intervening; but presently there is a slight stir among the occupants of the stand, and room is made for Miss Cunningham, who takes her place in the front row beside Mrs



Polwheedle ; and while greetings are exchanged with the other ladies, Yorke thinks how the latter seem to sink into utter insignificance beside this peerless creature. He notes, too, that while the appearance of the other ladies is generally suggestive of hurried rising, and further attention to the hair and person on their return home, Miss Cunningham's toilet, though perfectly simple, seems as complete and finished in its way as it might be if she were dressed for Ascot. And see, her pretty little hat, it is trimmed with blue, and there is a blue ribbon round her slender neck. Can this be mere coincidence ? But while he stands wondering how his colours can have become known, the young lady looking down, recognises and greets him with a gracious bow and smile, in which the young man thinks he can read sympathy and encouragement—encouragement for the impending event and also for the future. He feels his colour come and go, and his heart beats high as he lifts his hat and bows in reply, feeling, too, that the eyes of all the ladies in the front row are on him, and his first impulse is to make his way to the stand and express his gratitude ; but how to push his way through its occupants to

the front row ? and how find fitting words before so many people ? Abandoning this idea, therefore, as soon as conceived, he retires to the back of the enclosure to have a final look at the grey before the saddling time comes.

"There's young Yorke of the native infantry," observed Mrs Polwheedle, as she noticed Miss Cunningham's bow ; " he's got a horse in for the steeplechase, of all people. I shouldn't have thought he was one of the sort for that kind of thing ; but these subs are a harum-scarum lot."

"Colonel Falkland says that Mr Yorke is a very good rider, and I am sure there is nothing harum-scarum about him," replied the young lady.

"Oh no, that's just it ; young Yorke always looks as if he couldn't say bo to a goose ; and that's what surprised me so, his going in for this steeplechase."

"If he fails in that accomplishment it is not for want of oppor——" Then the young lady stopped ; for as Mrs Polwheedle's voice was not of the lowest, she became conscious of acting as Yorke's champion before all the occupants of the stand.

The sport provided on this morning was un-

usually good, there being as many as four events on the card, besides the steeplechase, which was last on the list, and by general consent the most interesting of all ; for, besides the exciting nature of the contest in itself, it possessed the additional attraction of there being no less than six entries, whereas for no other race had there been more than three competitors.

The particulars of the competition may be best described by copying the following extract from the card of the day :—

“No. 5. The Grand Mustaphabad Steeplechase. A cup value Rs. 500, presented by Colonel Tartar, — Hussars, with a sweepstakes of Rs. 50, half forfeit. Open to all horses *bonâ fide* the property of residents at Mustaphabad. Catch-weights. New Steeplechase Course, about two miles and a half.

- |                       |   |                                  |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Mr Lunge's, —      | } | B. Cape H. Veteran, Mr Gowett.   |
| Hussars,              |   |                                  |
| 2. Mr Scurry's, —     | } | Ch. A. H. Roostum, Owner.        |
| Hussars,              |   |                                  |
| 3. Mr Chupkin's 19th  | } | Br. C.B. Mare Laura, Owner.      |
| Irreg. Cav.,          |   |                                  |
| 4. Mr Stride's, H.A., |   | B. S. B. H. Sentry, Owner.       |
| 5. The Confederates', | { | Br. Austr. Mare,<br>Maid Marian, |
|                       |   |                                  |
| 6. Mr Yorke's, 76th   | } | G. C. B. H. Devotion, Owner."    |
| N. I.,                |   |                                  |

Mr Gowett was the light weight of the Husars, and had already won two flat races at the meeting with horses belonging to officers of the regiment. Egan, also, in whose selection of the Indian army for his profession Newmarket and the home ring had sustained an irreparable loss, had carried off more than one event for a sporting indigo-planter, who it was rumoured paid him a handsome commission thereon, and now appeared for the first time on the mysterious mare entered as Maid Marian, a ragged hipped animal of undeniable blood and power, but with bent knees, and back sinews concealed from view by elastic stockings. Maid Marian, who seemed to walk lame, took her preliminary canter in very stiff fashion, suggestive of age and hard work, but went over the first fence in very business-like style. Mr Egan himself, a slight, sallow little fellow, with smooth face and a small scrubby moustache, who always made appearances a secondary consideration to business, was attired in a brown garment resembling a decayed stable-jacket, with serviceable brown cords and ancient top-boots, but looked, as to style of riding, every inch a jockey. "It's legs and arms that do the business," he observed to

Mr Sniffers of his regiment, when that gentleman had attempted to banter him on his personal appearance ; “ not what’s outside of ’em. I’ll tell you what, Sniff, I’ll give you two stone over a mile for anything you like to name, and you shall wear silk tights and pumps, if you like,”—an offer which his brother officer declined to close with. All the rest were got up in regular racing trim, except Chupkin, who had a wife to dress as well as himself, and therefore with virtuous self-denial rode in his regimental jack-boots. Mr Scurry was especially splendid in scarlet with a white cap, and polished tops just arrived from England. Yorke’s colours were blue. The young man, in view of a certain promissory-note rapidly maturing, had prudently refrained from investing in a new saddle for the occasion, but had supplied himself with new girths, stirrup-leathers, and bridle, all strong and serviceable.

Mr Scurry’s Roostum, as has been mentioned, was a hot favourite at the race-ordinary two days before ; but the circumstance that this sporting young gentleman had lost both the races ridden by him on two different horses on the first day, compared with the obvious skill

and address displayed by Messrs Gowett and Egan, had depreciated Roostum in public estimation, and Veteran, a winner of the previous day, was now first favourite, with Maid Marian in close attendance; for although nothing was known as to the antecedents of the latter animal, it was generally understood that Mr Egan and his confederate knew what they were about. Nevertheless, when Mr Scurry rode Roostum out of the paddock, the beauty of the horse and its unusual size for an Arab, contrasted with the gummy appearance of the mare and Mr Lunge's ancient charger, led to a reaction of feeling, more especially as Roostum, although very fresh and impetuous, and almost unseating his rider in his efforts to get his head loose, nevertheless cleared the first fence in his preliminary canter like a deer; and before it returned to the starting-post the chestnut Arab was almost restored to its position in public estimation. The ladies, at any rate, were entirely in favour of the pretty creature with the smart jockey, as it bounded along with the springy action peculiar to Arabs, tossing its shapely neck, and ready to jump out of its skin.

The steeplechase-course extended beyond the circumference of the ordinary race-course, which

it left at the quarter-mile post out and rejoined again at the distance-post, the run in being parallel to and inside the flat course, so that the fences could be set up beforehand without interfering with the previous flat races, while the same winning-post served for both. Thus the flat course intervened between the stand and the straight part of the steeplechase-course; but as the former was only wide enough for about half-a-dozen horses to run abreast, the spectators would have as close a view of the scene as could be desired. The direction of the running was from right to left, or in the opposite order to the movement of the hands of a clock, and there were altogether nine jumps; first, a couple of hedges, which were in fact hurdles covered with bushes; then the mud wall, with a little grip on the further side from which the material to build it had been taken; then another hedge; then a hedge with a small ditch on either side; then a ditch with a bank beyond; then two more hedges or hurdles; lastly, the water-jump, the only really stiff thing in the course—a low bank topped with a hedge, and a wet and broad ditch beyond. This was about fifty yards short of the grand stand and

winning-post, so that the horse first over would probably win. The ditch was in fact only a shallow trench about eighteen inches deep, but which might have been eighteen feet from the look of the thing, although to retain it even at that depth in the sandy soil involved a constant supply of water, and the station water-carts were at work up to the last moment before the race. The course, sparsely covered with grass, was perfectly level throughout, and the fences standing up naked on the plain seemed calculated to invite the horses on the outside to swerve to the right or left.

And now the six horses having taken their preliminary canter, including the conventional leap over the first fence and back again, have come back to the starting-post opposite the stand, with their backs to the wet ditch ; and all except Roostum being perfectly steady, the start is soon effected, and away they go at the signal, a little cloud of dust rising from their hoofs. Chestnut horses, and especially chestnut Arabs, are proverbially impetuous, and the noble Roostum was no exception to the rule. He was hard to hold when going alone ; but the clatter of five other horses galloping alongside is altogether too much,



and in a few seconds he breaks away at full speed, nose high in air, his rider lying back in the saddle and in vain trying to hold him in. This attitude is not favourable for steeple-chasing; Roostum crashes through the first fence without attempting to rise to it, tearing a gap about thirty feet wide, through which the others follow at a more leisurely pace, and he gets through the second in the same way; but this mode of dealing with the wall is not equally successful. Charging that in the same blind way, the gallant chestnut rolls over heavily on the other side, shooting his rider still further forward. Fortunately the race committee, with considerate forethought, had ploughed up the light soil beyond the wall, so that Mr Scurry sustains no serious injury, although unable to proceed with the race; and he has left the others so much behind that they have time to avoid riding over him as they clear the wall, which they all do except Sentry, whose rider taking the outside, goes so temptingly close to the end of the obstacle that the horse swerving evades it altogether, and Mr Stride, after two or three ineffectual efforts to make him face it again, is forced to give up.

The competitors are now reduced to four. Veteran takes up the running, and although not going the pace with which Scurry led off, Mr Gowett is evidently trying to cut the others down. Next comes Chupkin on Laura, which had blundered at the wall, although getting over safely; next our friend Yorke; Egan bringing up the rear some way behind. So far Yorke feels that he has got along well; the pace is faster than he expected, but the little grey took the wall beautifully. The next fence, another covered hurdle, is a mere joke for all the horses. The double ditch and hedge is more formidable, but again they all get over. Next comes the ditch and bank, and Mr Gowett pulling up Veteran to an easy canter, the old horse jumps cleverly on to the bank and down the other side. Chupkin, who goes at it full gallop, is less fortunate; his horse blunders at the top and falls: again the friendly plough averts further disaster.

Yorke cannot afford to pull up for the ditch and bank, lest Gowett should be left with too long a lead, so drives the grey at it, who clears the jump in his stride, thereby gaining considerably on Veteran. The mare also gets over all right, and the three are then left in the race.

There now remain only two hedges and the water-jump ; but the old horse still leads by some lengths, and Yorke knows that as far as galloping goes his own has no chance against it. Egan also seems to have played a waiting game too long ; he has been creeping up latterly, but is still some distance behind ; there is only a quarter of a mile left, and if Veteran gets over his jumps he must win.

But here fortune comes to the rescue ; the last hedge had been put up just at the point where the steeplechase - course joined the other, and Veteran, which had been running in a flat race the day before, suddenly swerves, and despite all Mr Gowett's efforts, turns into the flat-race course, and gallops past the stand on the wrong side of the rails.

Yorke is now left in front with only one competitor against him, and for the first time there rises up within him the distinct hope of victory. But the old mare is drawing close ; her stiffness is wearing off as she warms up with work ; Yorke must keep ahead as far as the water-jump if he is to win. So feeling he presses his horse on.

Now it is not galloping but really racing pace,

and, novice though he is at the work, he feels that his horse is not going well within himself; his stride has lost its spring, there is no longer any pull on the reins. He failed to clear the last hedge properly, but brushed through the top, and every yard since he has been going worse. The little horse is done. Now the last and biggest jump of all is close in front, and Yorke would fain have taken a pull on his horse and brought him up to it quietly. But there is no time to do this; glancing round he sees Egan riding coolly a bare two lengths behind. There is nothing for it but to cram on, and spurring Devotion, he drives him as hard as he can at the obstacle. The game little horse rises at it, clears the fence, but fails to clear the ditch, and coming down with his fore-feet against the further side, rolls over heavily, discharging his rider beyond, where he lies stunned and motionless, while the mare, coming over safely a second afterwards, canters in a winner.

There was a rush of spectators to the scene of the accident, but almost before they could reach him Yorke had recovered his senses, though puzzled at first to know why he should be looking up at the sky with the fence behind him.

He had in fact alighted on his head, turning a somersault as well as his horse. Spragge and Colonel Falkland were kneeling over him, and others ready to help, including all the medical officers on the ground ; but in a minute or two he was able to stand up, and very soon, refreshed by the brandy-and-water of a thoughtful contributor, to walk toward the stand, while the sympathetic Spragge, as soon as he saw his friend recovered, turned his attention to Devotion, which had picked itself up and was standing quietly by, recovering its breath. "Little nag's all right too, I do believe," said Jerry, patting the horse affectionately, and loosening the saddle-girths ; "it was a cropper too, and no mistake : there's a good bit of hair wanting from the off knee, though," he added, rubbing the part affected tenderly, "but it ain't deep ; daresay we shall be able to get on your skin again, old man ;" and so saying, led the gallant grey back to the saddling enclosure.

"Your horse only wanted a little more blood to make a finish of it," said Colonel Falkland, in his pleasant low voice as he led Yorke back leaning on his arm ; "the course was just half a mile too long for you ; but at any rate you are the first

man who ever rode a Cabulee in a steeplechase, so you have done something to be proud of."

"Here is a lady who wants to see you," said the commissioner, meeting them, "to make sure you are really not hurt," and led him to the back of the stand, where stood Miss Cunningham at the top of the steps, waiting to meet him, pale and anxious.

As he advanced she ran down to meet him, holding out her hand, and led him up the stairs. At the top was a sort of landing-place with two or three chairs. The young lady, still holding his hand, almost pushed him into one.

"But I assure you I am quite able to stand," said Yorke, looking up with a smile at the anxious face above his; "I really feel ashamed to be sitting like this while you are standing."

"Oh, but please do," said the young lady, earnestly, "to oblige me, at any rate;" and her voice, always rich and tremulous, reflected now the emotion she felt, and thrilled through the young man's heart. "Papa," she continued, "we must drive Mr Yorke home—won't you call the carriage?"

"No, no; keep your seat," said the commissioner to Yorke, descending the steps, and stop-

ping him as he rose to execute the order ; "I'll bring up the carriage in a moment ; you stay here and let my daughter take care of you."

Take care of him ! As the young man sat in his chair, looking up at the beautiful face before him, he felt as if the fracture of every bone in his body would have been a cheap price to give for so much happiness. Another moment and he thought he must have fallen at her feet to express in some form the outpouring of his heart, but at that instant Mrs Polwheedle and some other ladies emerged from the back of the stand.

"Oh, here is our gallant rider, safe and sound !" she exclaimed. "Colonel Tartar says you rode really very well, so you ought to feel proud ; but upon my word you gave us ladies a regular fright. I declare I thought I should have fainted. You might have heard me scream right across the course. Really you young men ought to be more careful and not ride in this harum-scarum way."

"Here is the carriage, Olivia," called out the commissioner from the bottom of the steps ; and almost before he knew how it happened, Yorke found himself driving away by the side of Mr Cunningham, with his daughter, who insisted on taking the back seat, sitting opposite him.

"Knew the old girl would do the trick, if she didn't founder in the middle of the race," observed M'Intyre to Egan, as the two were engaged in bandaging Maid Marian's legs under a tree behind the stand.

"It's about the last job she's good for though, I expect," replied Egan, who now, his work accomplished, was refreshing himself with a No. 1 cheroot. "I felt uncommon nervous at starting, for she was as lame as a tree, but she got all right when she warmed up."

"I was in a funk too, I can tell you," replied the other, "when I saw Yorke going so well at the finish. It would have been uncommon awkward if he hadn't come to grief."

"Awkward! bless you, I could have passed him at any time; it was Gowett who had the race if the old horse hadn't bolted. I didn't think he could have gone such a bat. But Yorke would have done well if he had had something better under him. I didn't think he could ride like that; I always thought him a muff."

"There, old lady," continued Mr Egan, the bandaging completed, apostrophising the winner, "now you'll do for the present. It don't much matter, though, if you have to be shot to-morrow; you have done our job for us this time at



any rate." And, indeed, each of these gentlemen had won what is called a hatful on the transactions of the meeting—enough to enable them to take up all their promissory-notes, and to keep them clear of the Court of Requests for some time to come. Nor was the result wonderful when the rumour now floating about the course was confirmed, due to the observation of a chance visitor from Bengal who happened to be present, that Maid Marian was no other than the celebrated Miranda, changed only by time and in name, winner of everything she had run for at Calcutta and Sonepore about eight years before, and which, after retiring from the turf, and thence running a downward career of hunter and hack, culminating in the inglorious office of drawing the deputy-collector of Hajeepore daily to and from cutchery in his buggy, and the deputy-collector's family for their evening airing in a palanquin carriage, had emerged from her retirement to earn one more victory—an event brought about by the circumstance of Mr M'Intyre having chanced to pay a visit to his uncle, the judge of Hajeepore, during the previous cold season, and discovering there the old animal's retreat.

## CHAPTER XII.

YORKE felt as if in a trance as he drove away from the race-course, sitting opposite to Miss Cunningham in the carriage he had been accustomed to view reverentially from a distance as if the chariot of a goddess ; and when the young lady, declaring that he would catch cold in his thin silk jacket, insisted on wrapping her spare shawl over his shoulders, even the presence of the commissioner and the mounted orderlies behind could hardly restrain him from seizing one of the slender hands which performed the office and carrying it to his lips. Withal he could not help feeling a sense of the incongruity of his position. Had he broken a couple of legs there might have been some excuse ; but when, in fact, there was nothing the matter with him, was he not an impostor to allow himself to be petted in this way ? Still it was inexpressibly delightful.

It seemed as if hardly a few seconds had passed when the swift-trotting horses turned off the road, through the hole in the mud wall which did duty for a gateway, and were pulled up before the veranda of Yorke's bungalow. Must then this vision of paradise end so quickly ? Then a sudden fit of boldness seized the young man. It was getting late, and they had still a long way to go ; would not Mr and Miss Cunningham stop and breakfast ?

The commissioner said something about having to be early in court, and that Colonel Falkland, who was to ride back, would be waiting breakfast for them. Well, then, pleaded Yorke, they must at least have a cup of tea before going on ; and he made his request so earnestly, standing at the steps of the carriage, jockey-cap in hand, Miss Cunningham's shawl still over his shoulders, while she looked at her father as if seconding the request, that the good-natured commissioner agreed to stop for a few minutes, and the little party entered the bungalow.

A qualm of doubt shot across Yorke's mind as to the state in which the bungalow might be, and lest the table-attendant might appear clothed in the dirty calico drawers and skull-cap

which formed his ordinary costume while preparing breakfast for the establishment ; but that worthy having espied the carriage and out-riders from the little shed on the borders of the garden which did duty for kitchen, donned his tunic, waist-belt, and turban of white with a quick appreciation of the position, and came running up to make his salaam ; fortunately, too, the joint valet of the establishment had already dusted and arranged the sitting-room. It was a simple apartment enough, and might have been taken for the type of many similar ones to be found scattered over India. A room about twenty feet square, with whitewashed walls, and a whitewashed ceiling-cloth concealing the thatched roof, entered from the little veranda by a door in the middle of one side. This veranda, supported on wooden posts, was equipped with a pair of cane-backed lolling chairs with projections for resting the legs upon. A door on the opposite side opened into a similar veranda, where three earthen jars suspended one above the other in a bamboo frame did duty as a water-filter ; sundry empty boxes of beer and soda-water were piled against the wall ; while a bull-terrier, the property of Mr Spragge, was

nursing in a basket a family of puppies. A talking mina in a cage, and a rat-trap, completed the adornments of this veranda. In the centre of the sitting-room was a camp-table, whereon was set out the breakfast-equipage on a passably white cloth. In one corner stood Spragge's writing-table, also susceptible of being folded up and carried on a camel, and therefore not furnished with drawers; failing which, Mr Spragge's correspondence and business papers were distributed on the top, for the most part muster-rolls, company returns, and tradesmen's bills, mixed up with a loose cheroot or two and some discarded quill-pen stumps. Another camp-table sacred to Yorke's affairs presented a more orderly arrangement. For ornament the walls were decorated with a couple of boar-spears placed crosswise, a couple of fowling-pieces with cleaning rods and appurtenances, and a modest assortment of hunting-whips and walking-canes. There were also a couple of coloured engravings, each representing a female figure with low dress held on by no particular fastening, and kept up in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity, spotless bare feet, and simpering face, entitled respectively Spring and Summer:

works of art purchased by Mr Spragge at an auction, and accepted by him as representing the most refined type of female beauty, but now somewhat spotted and discoloured by the damp of successive rainy seasons. There was also the punkah, which had remained hanging during the cold season, and now drooped more at one end than the other by reason of partial decay of the suspending ropes. A hanging book-shelf completed the inventory. The open doors right and left, communicating with the owners' respective bedrooms, showed that the rest of the bungalow was furnished in the same simple fashion. Each room contained a camp-bed, a chair, a chest of drawers, the top of which garnished with spurs did duty for a dressing-table, and a couple of bullock trunks, with a row of boots and shoes arrayed against the wall. Add an absence of curtains, save some of rushes before the glass doors to keep out the flies and sparrows, and a bright Indian sun reflected within, and the abode, if unadorned and simple, was light and cheerful.

"You see here another phase of Indian life," said Yorke, while the order for tea—given not without a qualm lest the establishment should

prove unable to produce a third tea-cup—was in course of execution; “all is not splendour and luxury, you see.”

“A soldier’s habits ought to be simple,” said Miss Cunningham, looking round the room; “and in these days of luxury and self-indulgence, don’t you think it is simplicity which is to be admired rather than furniture and knick-knacks?” And as she asked the question with her earnest voice, Yorke felt that henceforth the life of a faqueer should be his highest ideal. “But I see you have the best of furniture,” she continued, pointing with her parasol to the little book-case; and then going nearer to it, added, “all for use too—Napier, Jomini, Cæsar, Arrian, Homer (I am glad you find a little room for poets among all these learned people), ‘Military Surveying,’ ‘Mathematics for Practical Men.’ Ah! if some one would only write a book of mathematics for unpractical women! Colonel Falkland said you were very studious; but it must be hard to read all these dry books in this climate. Already I feel it almost impossible sometimes to do anything useful, and they say this heat is nothing to what is coming by-and-by.”

"These books belong most of them to Captain Braddon of my regiment. He was on the staff for many years, you know, and has a regular library. If the days are hot sometimes they are long enough for anything. The real difficulty ought to be, not reading books, but procuring them ; but the best of us are sadly idle fellows, I am afraid."

"And here is the Blue-book on the Crimean war, too," observed the commissioner, taking it up, and immediately becoming absorbed in its contents.

Then Yorke had the young lady to himself for a few sweet minutes, while he showed her Spragge's puppies and the talking mina, till the tea was brought, and the party sat down to partake of it, Yorke bringing a third chair from his bedroom, still in his jockey dress, which he would fain have changed, for the wearing of it seemed to invite continued attention to his feats and his fall, but that he recollected that the bedroom door could not be got to close ; moreover, he grudged the time, and indeed the moments flew away only too quickly—for, the tea consumed, the Commissioner was urgent to be going, Miss Cunningham too pleading as an



excuse for hurrying away that Colonel Falkland would be waiting breakfast; and it seemed hardly five minutes before they were again in their carriage. And then he held Miss Cunningham's hand for a moment in his own, while she, looking into his face with her dark eyes, for the last time expressed in earnest tones her hope that he would not suffer from the effects of his accident; and then the carriage with the two orderlies behind was soon whirled away out of sight, leaving the young man standing on the steps of the veranda, his regret at their departure more than counterbalanced for the moment by the elation which their visit had caused. What if this visit should be the forerunner of happiness to come, Miss Cunningham sitting under his roof, and without the Commissioner, and sharing not only his tea, but everything else? How pointedly she had declared for simplicity! Well, his future house should be better than this, and yet be still simple and modest in comparison with what she was accustomed to.

Yorke's rise in public estimation in consequence of his performances was sufficiently indicated by his receiving in the forenoon an invitation to dine with Colonel Tartar the following evening

at the Hussar mess, where he sat next his host, with Major Winge on the other side, Gowett and Scurry, who were loud enough elsewhere, talking in subdued tones at the end of the table; and afterwards took a hand at sixpenny whist with the colonel, the doctor of the regiment, and the major; for Colonel Tartar, although not averse to an occasional bet in public, discounted high play in his own mess-room.

## CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW days had passed after the Grand Mustaphabad Steeplechase, during which Yorke was casting about in vain to discover some opportunity for obtaining a glimpse of the one person who now made up his world, uneasy and restless at getting no news of her, yet not venturing to present himself at the Residency lest he should be thought to be presuming too much on the sympathy Miss Cunningham had shown on that occasion; when one morning Mr Spragge, returning from the mess a little later than his chum, came across the little garden towards the veranda where Yorke was sitting in his easy-chair, waving a piece of paper in his hand, and calling out, "Don't you wish you were me, my boy! Here's a start!" handed the paper to Yorke to read. It ran as follows:—

“BRIGADE OFFICE, *February* —

“The 76th N.I. will furnish a detachment of one European officer and 80 sepoy to receive charge of treasure from the detachment —th N.I. which arrived at the station this morning, and to convey the same to the Residency. The officer to report himself at the Brigade Office for instructions at 3 P.M.

“By order.

“ADJUTANT’S OFFICE, *76th N.I.*

“With reference to the foregoing extract from Brigade Orders, Ensign Spragge is directed to take charge of the detachment, which will be furnished by Nos. 3 and 4 companies in equal proportions, and will parade at 3 P.M.

“By order.

“J. POYNTER,

“*Lt. and Adjutant.*”

“What do you think of that, my boy, for an opportunity for making the running?” said Spragge, while the other read the extract with eager face; “cut you out, old fellow, and no mistake. No, no, Arty, it’s only my chaff,” he continued, seeing that Yorke’s eye glared on him

with a ferocious expression quite unusual to it. "I shan't aspire to the lady herself, you know; I shall make up to the little French girl—Madoiselle Justine, isn't her name? I shouldn't know a bit what to say to the mistress; never was a lady's man. I wish I knew a little French, though. I couldn't make love in English, if you paid me for it; but I feel as if I could do the thing in French at a tremendous pace, if I only knew how to talk it."

"You are very glib with your anticipations," said Yorke, who had risen from his chair and was pacing up and down the veranda; "but you won't have too much time to display your accomplishments. I suppose you will be back again to night?"

"Back to-night! not a bit of it. It's the Nawab's stipend, don't you see, that's come from the lower provinces. It has to be made over to his people, and there will be counting, and weighing, and receipt-taking, and what not, which will take a precious lot of time. Sure to be kept waiting one day, if not two. Oh yes, I hope to punish the Commissioner's champagne at dinner to-night, and no mistake. But I say," he continued, noticing Yorke's eager, anxious

face, "I had forgotten about you all the time. What a selfish chap I am, to be sure! Now, you needn't look so fierce, Arty; of course I've got eyes in my head, even if I can't see through a stone wall; why shouldn't you go instead of me? No, I don't want to go a bit, I was only humbugging about the little French girl—in fact I'd much rather stay at home. The thing's done in a moment. I'll just step over and tell the adjutant that I have a particular engagement, and ask him to alter the roster. So I have, I want a game of rackets this evening most particular;" and so saying the good-natured fellow set off on his errand, hardly waiting to hear his friend's hearty—"I declare, Jerry, you are the best fellow that ever lived."

The detachment of the 76th duly marched into the Residency grounds a little before sunset, the senior native officer with drawn sword leading the little column, the tumbrils with the treasure in the midst, Yorke on horseback in the rear. They were met at the entrance gate by one of the Commissioner's red-coated servants, who led the way to a clump of trees on the right just within the enclosure wall, which was to be the site for their encampment. In

answer to Yorke's inquiry why the tent he had sent on in advance was not pitched and ready, the man explained that the Commissioner had ordered the officer's things to be taken to the house, where a room was prepared for him, and his servant was now waiting ; and while the man was speaking, Yorke descried the Commissioner and his daughter advancing from the house towards him. Yorke had never seen Miss Cunningham on foot, except when close by in a room, or surrounded by people : as she now came across the lawn, attired in a light muslin dress—for the days were getting warm—he had time to notice the grace of her light step, the easy movement of her tall figure ; while from her dainty boots to her broad-brimmed garden-hat, everything about her seemed equally tasteful and refined. The very parasol she carried, he thought, was like the wand borne by a goddess to enchant and subdue mortals.

The Commissioner, after greetings, explained that he had taken the liberty of assuming that Yorke would be their guest while at the Residency, and so had ordered his baggage to the house ; and when the latter objected, with sore misgivings lest he should be taken at his word,

that duty required him to sleep with the men by the treasure, Mr Cunningham relieved his mind by explaining that his duty had in fact ended with the delivery of the treasure at the Residency. Strictly speaking, the Commissioner ought then and there to take over the money from him, but it would be simpler to have it made over direct to the Nawab's people from the tumbrils, and so save a double transfer, the Commissioner meanwhile being responsible for its safe custody. Thus Yorke could accept the invitation without any qualms of conscience. He would actually spend a whole day and sleep under the same roof with his beloved. It was like a vision of paradise opening before him.

"And so here is the poor horse that fell with you," said Miss Cunningham, turning towards Devotion, which during the conversation had been standing peacefully a little behind its master in charge of the barelegged groom. "None the worse, I see. How nice the poor fellow looks!" she added, moving up and patting its neck. "Will he eat bread, Mr Yorke? if so, we must give him some presently, when the man brings it for Selim. I am so glad to see it has got off without harm as well as its master.



You must have thought it so unkind of us," she added, turning to him, "never to have sent to inquire after you; but Colonel Tartar was calling here, and said you had been dining with him the evening before, and gave a very good account of you." And the pang of jealousy that Yorke felt at hearing of Colonel Tartar's visit was sufficiently allayed by the reflection that Miss Cunningham had been thinking and talking about him. Stopping first to post his sentries, he then with elated heart followed his hosts in their visit to the stables, where the young lady fed her Arab with bread and lucerne grass, reserving, however, some morsels for Devotion, while Yorke looked on in an ecstasy of pride. Thence they strolled into the garden, and wandered about till it was dusk and time to dress for dinner.

The house, flat-roofed, formed a great square block, one storey high, the floors raised about four feet from the ground, the public rooms in the centre, the sleeping-rooms opening to the spacious veranda which extended round the house. Yorke's room, which seemed big enough to take in the whole of his bungalow, was entered from the east veranda by two enormous

doors, which served also as windows : a door on the opposite side communicated with the drawing-room. Miss Cunningham's own rooms, no doubt, would be on the west side, and she thought that she was occupying the same house made the whole building seem sacred ; and the young man dressed himself for dinner with a sort of pious awe.

On entering the drawing-room, now dimly illuminated—for it required a great wealth of lamps and candles to light up this great salon properly, an expenditure reserved for large parties—Yorke made out that there was another person present, who proved on closer acquaintance to be Captain Sparrow. That gentleman received him with languid affability, observing that he supposed there was a good deal of duty in the way of treasure-escort and work of that sort, which must be an agreeable relief from the monotony of cantonment life. Then presently Miss Cunningham entered in a dinner dress of silk, for the evenings were still chilly. Surely, thought Yorke, each change of toilet is more becoming than the last. Then came the Commissioner—Colonel Falkland had returned to his own province—and dinner being announced,

they repaired to the breakfast-room, always used for small parties or when the family were alone, and which with its small round table, well lighted up, looked bright and cheerful by contrast with the dim drawing-room, — Captain Sparrow conducting the lady, Yorke and the Commissioner following.

The dinner was very quiet : the Commissioner was taciturn, according to his wont ; while Yorke was almost too happy for conversation, nor did the brilliant epigrammatic turns of speech which would alone have been worthy of utterance in the presence of the beautiful hostess, come readily uppermost. Sparrow, however, in his languid way was talkative enough, and Yorke observed with secret complacency that Miss Cunningham was evidently amused at his harmless vanity and his affectation of refinement. The same sense of humour, he thought, was apparent in the earnestness with which, after their return to the drawing-room, she pressed him to sing, going to the piano and beginning the accompaniment of one of his songs ; when the captain, nothing loath, stood up beside her and warbled forth a ditty in his approved style. His song ended, the Commissioner led him away to

the adjoining billiard-room, and then followed for Yorke a blissful half-hour, while Miss Cunningham sang to him, on his pressing her, one song after another ; and as the young man stood by her side, watching her face, the one point of light in the great dim chamber, they seemed so entirely alone, and he was so borne along on the tide of emotion aroused by the tender accents of her voice, and the nearness of her person, that his humility and bashfulness for once forsook him. Surely, he thought, all this hope cannot be born altogether of delusion. In that gentle breast there needs must be some responsive sympathy with so much devotion, which only awaits an appeal to be called forth : and in another moment Yorke might have fallen at her feet to pour out his tale of love, his hopes, his fears, his sense of unworthiness to aspire to the priceless reward he sought for, when a voice was heard at the other end of the room, that of Mr Cunningham, asking them to come and join in a four-game, repressing the ecstasy of passion which was on the point of finding utterance. And the words which were rushing to his lips remained unspoken.

The glare of the billiard-room, with its unro-

mantic accessories of settees and cigars, acted like a disenchantment to recall our subaltern to the prosaic realities of everyday life; but he found some compensation for the descent on its being settled that he was to be Miss Cunningham's partner. In billiards, at any rate, he could be her master (although he thought with an introspective sneer that it was a contemptible thing to excel in such a matter), for he was much the best player of the four, while the lady was only a beginner; and to give confidential advice about each stroke, to be even allowed to touch her hand and adjust the taper fingers so as to form a proper rest for the cue, this was a new form of bliss.

But the happiest hour must have an end. The second game finished, Miss Cunningham, placing her fair arms on her father's shoulders, greeted him with a kiss on either cheek, and holding out her hand graciously to each guest, retired from the room. Captain Sparrow followed her example; and then the Commissioner, proposing an early ride in the morning, wished his visitor good-night, and the gentlemen repaired to their respective rooms. Then Yorke, lighting a cigar, strolled across the park to visit his guards,

wandering afterwards about the lawn on his side of the house. He would fain have carried his steps to the other side, when perchance some light might indicate at a distance the shrine which guarded his mistress ; but although the watchman and some of the numerous servants of the household had passed that way on their various errands, and he knew therefore that her chamber must be closed, a sense of delicacy restrained him. But at last, tired out with walking, he sought his room, stumbling over his bearer asleep in the veranda, and fell asleep himself while recalling the minutes that had been passed, the voice, the gestures, the words of his beloved.

Next morning, his late hours of the previous night notwithstanding, Yorke was up with the first grey light of dawn, although not sooner than the Commissioner, who was a regular old Indian as regards early rising ; but it was with a pang of disappointment that he found only one riding-horse besides Devotion was standing saddled under the portico. Selim was not there. His daughter, Mr Cunningham said, was not going to ride that morning, but would have

some tea ready for them when they returned; and accordingly, they rode through the city, which Yorke had never seen before, and where he had the opportunity of contrasting the deferential salaams accorded to the great man on his way through the streets, with the air of insolent curiosity with which any unknown subaltern performing the journey alone would be regarded. The Commissioner had various duties in the town—a new tank in course of excavation to visit, the widening of a new street in progress, the scene of a late robbery to examine, and so forth—and the sun had mounted high before they returned to the Residency, when, as they entered the park, Yorke's quick eye discovered Miss Cunningham sitting by a tea equipage under the shade of an awning spread by some trees on the western side, whither directing their horses they dismounted. Limited though was his visiting acquaintance, Yorke had often noticed that the Indian habit of a second toilet tended somewhat to impair the early appearance of such of the fair sex as took exercise in the morning. Ladies who came out at mid-day or evening in elaborate costumes, and with hair carefully dressed, would sometimes dispense with

these feminine graces when attiring themselves for the early ride or drive, and would appear with careless, not to say dishevelled locks, and appearance generally suggestive of repairs needful to be effected afterwards. No such remissness could be detected in the young lady who now, after morning greetings, began to pour out the tea. Her rich brown hair, though folded in simple braids, was fit, the young man thought, to grace a coronation ; the light morning robe was crisp and fresh ; in each aspect, he thought, she seemed more noble-looking, more delicate, and more refined. And, see, facing him across the lawn as he sits down, is the shrine from which his goddess has issued. The wide doors in the west veranda thrown open to catch the morning air reveal some mysteries of a chamber within—the dressing-glass trimmed with dainty muslin and ribbons, the wardrobe where rest the garments which have the happy duty of enshrining their sweet mistress.

Soon the little party was joined by another horseman, Dr Mackenzie Maxwell, the civil surgeon, who lived about half a mile from the Residency, and had charge of the jail, the hospital, and the Residency establishments—



a benevolent-looking, middle-aged man. Yorke had scarcely ever met him before, for Dr Maxwell lived very much by himself, and had almost forgotten his existence as a member of the Residency circle ; and for a moment, on observing the warm greeting accorded to the new-comer, he was disposed to feel jealous, when he remembered having heard that Maxwell was a widower ; but this feeling was soon allayed on perceiving the sort of fatherly way in which the doctor addressed his hostess, and the absence of embarrassment between the two. Soon the doctor and the Commissioner rose and strolled into the garden, leaving Miss Cunningham and Yorke alone. But although the latter, fully impressed with the importance of the occasion, was in an agony of suspense as the brief moments flew by, he could not manage to rise in his conversation beyond the level of commonplace ; and when the others returned he had only the consolation of there being still a long day before him, during which the Commissioner must be absent in court, and then, perhaps, a word or hint, or even some glance exchanged, might tell him that his case was understood, and not hopeless, and embolden him to pour out his tale of love.

"I have been telling the Commissioner," said the doctor, addressing that gentleman's daughter, "that I think your plan a very good one. What he wants just now is a little rest and change. I daresay a month at Patánpoor may do all that is needed ; at any rate it will be time to think of a season in the hills if this little trip fails to set him up. On what day do you think of going away?"

"Going away!" exclaimed Yorke, and in a tone of such unfeigned concern that the other two gentlemen could not help smiling ; and Miss Cunningham, with a little blush, explained that they were thinking of paying Colonel Falkland a visit for three or four weeks before the hot weather set in. Her father had been out of sorts for some time, but they hoped this change and the holiday might be sufficient to set him to rights again, and prevent the necessity for taking leave to the hills. "Papa dreads the idea of spending a whole hot season away from his beloved cutchery. You know he has never been to the hills all his life."

"Yes," broke in her father, "and I hope I never shall go ; a season of Simla lounging would finish me off, I believe, if I went up ill in the first instance."

“And you?” said Yorke, turning to his daughter, — “what are your feelings in the matter? But I need not ask,” he added, with a shade of bitterness in his voice. “Of course you must want to go. Simla is the gayest place in India.” And the subaltern’s heart sank within him as he pictured to himself for the moment its beautiful mistress treading the round of mountain dissipation, surrounded by all the male butterflies who flutter about that favourite resort.

“Of course I should like to see the hills,” she replied; “it is impossible to watch the distant peaks lighted up of a morning from here without longing to explore them; but I am a domestic creature,” she added, smiling, “although you may not suppose so, and I think I should like to spend my first year at any rate quietly here. I have been wandering all my life, and it seems really wrong to begin moving about again just when I am settled in a home at last. But I hope,” she added, looking anxiously towards her father, “that it may not be necessary.”

This little speech filled Yorke with a transport of delight. This desire to remain here, knowing as she must his feelings, might he not fairly interpret it to mean encouragement? Could

she indeed have said more, without departing from proper maidenly reserve? And as she threw that glance of filial anxiety towards her father he thought she had never looked so beautiful before.

"Papa," said the young lady presently, who was employed on some embroidery work, "you have given Dr Maxwell a cigar, but you have not offered one to Mr Yorke."

"I did not know that Mr Yorke smoked," replied her father, hastening to supply the omission by handing him his case; "he refused the offer of one last night in the billiard-room."

Yorke said, looking a little sheepish as he accepted the proffered cheroot, that he thought perhaps Miss Cunningham might not like the smell of tobacco.

"If she does not," said her father, "then she must be in perpetual discomfort, for I smoke all day long, and in every room in the house, I think. But I offered to give up the practice when first she came, and to keep my smoke to my own room—didn't I, Olivia?"

"You dear old papa! You must have had your old bachelor ways and comforts sufficiently broken in upon by my invasion, without my de-

priving you of your last remaining solace. Besides," she added, laughingly, "there was some real selfishness at the bottom of my request after all, for I did not want you to banish me to solitude in empty rooms. You are at home little enough as it is. It would be dreadful if you were to keep to your own room in order to enjoy your cigars there. Women should put up with smoking nowadays when it has become such a regular habit. Gentlemen seem to smoke as much here as they do in Italy. Colonel Falkland is the only person I have met who does not smoke."

"But then," said Yorke, "if smoking is discomfort to other people, surely it is better the sacrifice should be on the side of giving up what is after all an artificial want. Some ladies declare they can't bear the smell of tobacco even in the open air."

"Don't you think some ladies are a little affected? Could anybody pretend to smell the cigars you gentlemen are smoking now? Even in the house the rooms are so big and curtainless that no smell hangs about them. Besides, even in the open air, gentlemen would never sit quietly in their chairs like this, if they were not

allowed to smoke. We women have our fancy-work to keep us from the fidgets. So you see," she added, looking at Yorke archly, "selfishness is at the bottom of one's amiability after all. But gentlemen seem so much more domestic in this country, they deserve to be spoilt a little."

"Perhaps it is because they are petted at home that they are so domestic," observed Yorke. Adorable creature, he thought, perfect in every aspect, if ever woman lived who might insist on those about her dispensing with tobacco and the small vulgarities of life, surely it is you. Yet you make no terms for your beauty and your grace. Your mind is as simple as a child's, despite the lovely frame it is set in!

The doctor, his cheroot finished, now rose to go, summoning his groom and horse from the shelter of a neighbouring tree; and a red-coated messenger bringing the Commissioner a bundle of official vernacular reports, he lighted another cigar and departed for his own room. Miss Cunningham retired into the recesses of the western veranda; and Yorke repaired to his own side of the building to receive the reports of his native officers, and then to spend the time till breakfast in pretence of reading—really to live

the last half-hour over again, recalling each look and word.

The little party met together for breakfast at ten o'clock, but were now reinforced by Justine, the French maid or companion, who came in and took her place silently at the table, retiring on the conclusion of the meal. The Commissioner also got up then to go, observing that the Nawab's people were ordered to come for the treasure at four o'clock, but that it was quite possible they would be unpunctual after their fashion, and arrive too late to take it over that evening, "in which case," he added, "I must ask you to stay with us till Monday, for the transfer ought not to be made to-morrow, being Sunday. You will excuse my running away; but I must leave my daughter to entertain you." The infatuated young man with difficulty concealed his delight at this prospect of his visit being extended, and went across the grounds to Captain Sparrow's house. He could not well be at the Residency without paying him a call, so he would get it over as soon as possible, and then have the long day alone with his beloved.

On returning to the big house, Yorke found Miss Cunningham in the drawing-room engaged

upon a water-colour drawing. He hurried to her side, and looked over the paper—a sketch of trees taken in the garden, that she was finishing.

“What! do you paint, as well as play and sing?” cried the young man with admiration. “Where is the end to all your accomplishments?”

“One can’t play and sing for ever, you know,” said the young lady, laughingly, “and one gets tired of reading; so it is fortunate I am able to draw a little, or else time might hang heavily sometimes, with these long days spent alone.”

Ah! thought the young man with admiration, looking down on the graceful head that was bending over the work—then you too feel the want of a companion! He said aloud, “You talk of drawing a little: why, a regular artist could not do better than this.”

“You would not think much of this,” she answered, “if you had seen any good work;” then, seeing that the young man looked distressed at her rebuke, she added, kindly, “but perhaps you draw yourself also: it must be a very useful accomplishment for a military man.”

“No,” answered the young fellow, humbly;



"my education, such as it has been, is devoid of accomplishments of any sort."

"But there are better things than accomplishments," she continued, with earnestness, "and you have been busy mastering the solid acquirements needed in your profession. You have quite a reputation in that way among your brother officers."

"Acquirements are comparative. Most of our fellows are very lazy about these things, and so they exaggerate the smattering of knowledge others may pick up."

"But Colonel Falkland would not exaggerate, and he does not speak of your knowledge as a smattering."

"Colonel Falkland has a kind word to say of everybody ; but, after all, if one does know something of his profession, what is the good of it? If there are seven officers away from your regiment already, all the education in the world won't get a fellow on to the Staff. I beg your pardon," he added ; "of course this technical shop is like gibberish to you. What I mean is, that there is a fixed limit to the number of absentees from a regiment, and my turn has not come. Besides, there is Captain Braddon come

back to regimental duty, a splendid officer, who ought by rights to be served first. Not that rights have much to do with it," he added, bitterly; "a little interest is worth any amount of brains in these times."

"You mustn't say that," replied his companion; "Colonel Falkland said only the other day that he was certain that you would rise to something brilliant whenever the opportunity came."

That she should have been discussing his character and prospects with their common friend, and in such sympathising terms, sent a flush of pride and pleasure to the young man's face; but he replied, perhaps with a dimly-conceived desire to invite still further praise, "But when will opportunity come? The days of opportunity have gone by. For us young men there is nothing left but to grow old in the humdrum monotony of a subaltern's duties." Then he stopped, feeling that he was hardly giving himself a fair chance in thus running down his own position and prospects. And yet honesty forbade that he should make out his case better than it really was. But Miss Cunningham replied—

“Colonel Falkland says that every man in India gets his opportunity, if he only knows how to make use of it. He himself says he had never seen a shot fired (isn't that the expression ?) till he had been ever so many years in the army ; so you see there is still a margin of time available for you, before you enter the road to fame and fortune.”

There was a pause, while Yorke determined that the morning should not pass away with all its unlooked-for opportunities, without his asking her whether he might venture to hope to gain, at some future time, a greater and more valued prize than fame or fortune, and the young lady for her part plied her brush, as he stood by her side, hopeful yet uncertain, hardly daring yet longing to speak—when the door leading from her appartement opened, and Justine, the French maid, entering quietly, her work in hand, took a seat at a little distance from the table, and began silently to ply her needle.

Here was frustration of hopes. It was evident that Justine was destined to act as duenna, and that there would be no more *tête-à-tête* conversations for that day, unless he could contrive

some device for getting rid of her. A happy thought occurred to him. Looking through the portfolio which lay on the table, he observed—

“What a number of drawings you have made already—and all sketches from life apparently! These are groups of the different servants, I suppose; and there is your pretty Selim, and the Commissioner’s horse too. How industrious you must have been to have done so many!”

“Yes; but few of them are finished. I have been in a hurry to collect subjects for working up when the hot season comes, and when, they tell me, it will be impossible to draw out of doors.”

“Why not try a sketch of my encampment this morning, with the tents, and the bullocks and carts, and the sepoy standing about in various attitudes? It is still quite cool out of doors.”

“That is a capital idea; it would make a charming subject. This is a bad time of the day for sketching, when the sun is so high; but the trees will make light and shade. Suppose we start at once. But then we may be interrupted by callers?”

"Cannot you be 'not at home,' just for this one day?"

"But is it not a shame to give people the trouble of coming all the way out along that hot dusty road from the cantonment, merely to go back again without stopping to rest? I am sure I never drive into cantonments myself in the day-time without bringing a headache back."

"But this amount of heat and dust is like the Arctic regions compared with what we are going to have by-and-by. Besides, are you always so considerate? I have heard of people coming out along that hot dusty road to find the Residency doors closed, and that not so very long ago."

"Ah, I deserve your reproaches, and, will you believe me, I felt very penitent when I saw your card. But we really did not expect anybody that day, and papa was unwell, and I was keeping him company in his room. However, I owe you amends; so will you please give the order about our not being at home, and we will have chairs taken out under the trees."

The young man, enraptured at the success of his scheme, gave the needful order; and but that, with a dozen servants at hand, it would

have been a perfectly useless excess of zeal, he would have carried out the chairs and camp-table himself. As it was, he was fain to content himself with taking charge of the young lady's sketching-block and colour-box, while she went to get her garden-hat. The day was one of those towards the end of an Indian winter when the climate is perfect; the chill air of the cold weather had passed away, but the season for high winds, heat, and dust had not arrived; and as Yorke arranged the chairs under a tree from which a good view could be obtained of the little encampment, and where the fair artist would, while enjoying the light genial air, be protected from the bright sun overhead, and also be concealed from sight of any visitors driving up to the portico, he thought with an unwonted exaltation of feeling that in this long morning passed together the opportunity must surely arise, in some encouragement let fall, or some understanding expressed, for the avowal of his love. Alas! on returning from the encampment, where he had been grouping the men according to the artist's instructions, he saw a servant in the act of placing a third chair by side of the other two, to be occupied a few

moments later by the inevitable Justine, armed with enough embroidery to last through the day—silent herself, and the cause of silence in others. The opportunity, then, was gone, although there still remained the long morning to be passed in this sweet companionship, becoming each moment, as he felt, more friendly. “And I should be an ungrateful brute to find fault with my lot,” thought Yorke to himself. “I might have lived for a dozen years in the cantonment and not have become so intimate with her as the luck of this treasure-party, following the steeplechase, has made me already. And if she seemed charming and gracious before, when I had scarcely spoken to her, how much more admirable and perfect does she not appear to my better knowledge now! With all her beauty and accomplishments, how modest and humble-minded she is! and yet there is no want of humorous appreciation of character. She is shrewd enough to see through people, yet without any ill-nature in her remarks. Can she have failed,” he added, “to have seen through me and my secret?”

Thus thought the lover to himself, as the Commissioner, who had come over for a few

minutes from the court-house, led the way to the house for a late luncheon. The meal ended, they were again about to resume the morning's occupation, when a messenger announced the arrival of the Nawab's guard to take over the treasure, thus shattering the hope which Yorke had cherished of spending Sunday at the Residency. Putting on his uniform, he repaired to the spot where the detachment was encamped. The transfer of the money was a tedious affair; and when finished it was time for the detachment to set off on its march back to cantonments, and Yorke despatched them accordingly, returning to the house to pay his adieus.

He found the Commissioner in his study smoking a cigar, and his daughter sitting by him, reading a book; while the open carriage drawn up outside announced that they were about to take their evening drive. Already, thought Yorke with bitter heart, and yet ashamed of himself for harbouring such a feeling, they have their occupations and plans in which I hold no share.

"Good-bye!" said the Commissioner, holding out his hand, but without rising; "it was unfortunate the Nawab was so punctual—we should have been glad if you could have stayed till



Monday. But cannot we drive you down to cantonments? we may as well go that way as anywhere else."

Yorke would fain have clutched at even this brief respite, but he had to explain that his horse was waiting, and he must overtake his detachment presently and accompany it on foot into cantonments.

"Good-bye!" said Miss Cunningham, who had risen, holding out her hand; "it is so provoking of the Nawab to cut short your visit, you must——" What she was going to say he could not tell, for something in the expression of his earnest gaze caused her to drop her eyes, and with a slight blush withdraw her hand.

On the following Monday Yorke would have ridden out to the Residency, notwithstanding the shortness of the interval since he had last been there; a call after a dinner being proper, much more he argued should one be proper after a day's visit; but an order reached him in the morning to proceed on court-martial duty to a neighbouring station some fifty miles off, where officers were scarce, and he was fain to express his thanks in a note, which it is needless to say consumed a quantity of best paper before it got

itself written to his satisfaction ; the expression that the Friday and Saturday spent at the Residency had been the happiest moments of his life being eventually toned down to the effect that this had been the pleasantest visit he had ever paid.

The court-martial lasted for several days. When it was ended, Yorke determined to return by easy marches, stopping for a few days to shoot on the road, the plains round Mustaphabad being fairly supplied with game. In this way he would kill time till the month's absence of the Commissioner and his daughter should be completed, every day of which had been ticked off as it passed, for he felt that life in cantonments would be insupportable till their return. Thus spinning out the time allowed for his own return, he pitched his camp for the last day at a village about eight miles from Mustaphabad, and walking off his impatience by a long morning and evening tramp with his gun through the surrounding country, slept the sound sleep of fatigue in his little tent, and rode into cantonments early the next morning.

Spragge was away in the lines at the orderly room when he reached the bungalow ; so, calling for tea, and throwing off his coat, for the days

were now getting hot, he sat down in the veranda till his chum should return.

That gentleman soon came into view, cantering into the compound, his long legs upheld at a short distance from the ground by his diminutive pony ; and after bestowing a few cuffs and blessings on that animal's patient attendant for some faults of omission and commission, greeted his friend in his usual hearty manner.

The first topic of conversation was, of course, the amount of Yorke's bag ; next followed Yorke's inquiry what the news was.

"News ? there never is any news in this blessed place, except that it's getting infernally hot already, which you can find out for yourself. A lot of fellows have gone off to the hills for six months' leave, and almost all the ladies have started ; I should like to have gone off myself, but can't afford it ; and now we are in for the regular hot-weather dulness. Nothing but billiards and rackets left for a fellow to do. But I say, you ought to have been here, my boy, to come in for the goings-on of my cousin Ted while officiating commissioner. He has been doing the big official in tremendous style—bachelor parties, ladies' parties, handing in mother Pol-

wheel to dinner, and all the rest of it; hermetically-sealed soups and claret-cup poured out like water. Ted's been going it, and no mistake. Pity he's got such a short tether of the office!"

"Yes, indeed," said Yorke, trying to assume an air of indifference; "the Commissioner is to be back again this week, isn't he?"

"Comes back to-morrow, but only for a few days, you know; and I think they might have given Ted the acting appointment."

"Acting appointment!" said Yorke, starting up, and at once thrown off his guard, "what do you mean?"

"Why, bless me!" replied Spragge, "you don't mean to say you haven't heard the news? Why, it's been in all the papers a week ago. I thought, of course, you must have seen it. The Commissioner has been very unwell—liver gone wrong, I believe—and has been ordered home sharp, and Colonel Falkland is appointed to succeed him."

"Colonel Falkland!" cried Yorke, feeling suddenly as if something more remained to be told.

"Yes, of course," answered his friend; "he is engaged to Miss Cunningham, you know. They are to be married in a fortnight."

## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Mr Cunningham lost his young wife, which event happened just twenty-one years before the time at which this history begins, and within a year of his marriage, he was left with a little daughter on whom the poor mother had scarcely time to bestow a parting kiss before she died. The friendly wife of a brother civilian, who was present on the occasion, proposed to carry off the infant to her house and bring it up for the time with her own children; but the young widower was averse to parting with the charge, and the lady was fain to be content with coming over daily to bestow an occasional superintendence on his nursery establishment. A still more frequent supervision over the child's welfare was given by his friend, Lieutenant Falkland, who, although he declined the young widower's proposal that he should give up his

bungalow in cantonments, and share the other's more comfortable house in the civil lines, spent almost as much time there as if he had been a permanent occupant of it. The subaltern had plenty of leisure ; and his friend's servants were never sure during their master's long absence in court at what moment they might not receive a visit from Falkland, and even if they had been disposed to neglect the child would have been prevented by his vigilance. But indifference to their master's children is not a fault of Indian servants ; their weakness is rather in the way of too much petting and indulgence. In the case of a baby, however, there was not much room for injudicious kindness ; the little Olivia's wants were sufficiently ministered to by the stout young mussalmáni woman, who had been engaged from a neighbouring village to fulfil the office of wet-nurse ; and the young civil surgeon of the station, Dr Mackenzie Maxwell, declared in his daily visits that no child could be better cared for, or more thriving. As the little Olivia grew out of babyhood, almost the first person she came to recognise after her nurse and the old bearer who was appointed her special attendant, was the young officer ; and the child would hold

out her little arms to greet him as he came up the avenue of an evening while she was taking her walk in the old man's arms, attended by the nurse and another female, while a tall office-messenger with a red belt, brass plate, and gigantic umbrella brought up the rear. Long before she could understand the use of them, the self-appointed guardian began to pour in consignments of toys, which soon littered the young civilian's house ; Benares lacquered bricks, little wooden elephants and camels, cups and saucers, and tea equipages ; a swing to be hung up in the veranda ; with a rocking-horse as large as a Burmah pony. A visitor to Mr Cunningham's house in those days of a morning would generally find the same group assembled there : the father in an easy-chair smoking his cheroot ; his friend sitting more erect, as became a man with strict military ideas, and not smoking,—the two watching the child and the old bearer on the floor together, engaged in the joint task of erecting a tower, which, from the number of bricks strewed about the room, promised to assume the proportions of a very Babel.

Thus passed the child's earliest years, when just as she was beginning to prattle freely, and had been advanced to the dignity of a seat on a

raised chair at her father's breakfast-table, a disruption took place of the small' commonwealth which had conducted the government of the little Olivia's household. Falkland was appointed to the staff of the army on the frontier, and the good doctor was transferred to another station; while the advent of his successor was heralded by a reputation for his power of subduing the strongest constitutions of adults, and a perfectly ogre-like capacity for the massacre of children; such as escaped the first onslaught of his calomel, it was rumoured, invariably succumbed to the subsequent treatment. The arrival of this terrible official caused a general panic in the station. Mrs Spangle, the wife of the brother civilian already referred to, determined to anticipate by a year or two the time fixed for the inevitable home voyage; and Cunningham, thus left without his friends, accepted her offer to take his little daughter to England with her own children, to be made over on arrival to the charge of his only sister.

To Mrs Maitland, Cunningham's sister, who had no children of her own, the arrival of her little niece was a very welcome event; she soon came to love the child as her own, and Olivia found in her house a happy home, where even



the dimmest recollections of India soon faded away. Nor were the father's letters calculated to recall them. Cunningham did not possess the sort of literary power which alone could have enabled those unacquainted with the scenes among which it was spent to realise his mode of life; and, under the feeling that his letters had no real interest for the reader when they passed beyond mere personal topics, his correspondence, though still affectionate, gradually became brief and infrequent. His sister's letters were longer and more regular, for all home allusions could be understood by the parent, and full accounts of his daughter, her health, progress, and occupation, made up an interesting letter; and as soon as the child was able to write herself, each mail carried a letter from her to her unknown father, all to be carefully filed by the Indian exile, and containing a complete record of progress, beginning with the uncertain ink-tracings over her aunt's pencilled outlines, and so through the large round-hand and short stiff sentences of childhood and all the various developments of girlish hands, to the easy writing and ready expression of the accomplished young woman.

When Olivia was about twelve years old her uncle died, and his widow was shortly after-

wards ordered for her health to the south of France ; and having now no ties with England, and finding Continental life and climate to her taste, Mrs Maitland had continued from that time to reside with her niece in various parts of the south of Europe. Meanwhile Cunningham remained in India ; although not a brilliant man, his industry, temper, and judgment had gained for him a considerable reputation in his service, and whenever he was on the point of taking a furlough, the transfer to some new employment had always happened to prevent his doing so ; now a neglected district to be brought into proper form ; now a newly-annexed province to be reduced to order,—some call in the way of preferment appealing to his sense of duty and the love of distinction, and tempting him to stay in the country. Thus year after year passed away without the intended furlough being taken ; till at last, when Olivia was arrived at womanhood, and the question arose whether instead of his going home the daughter should not rejoin her father in India, he was invited by the Government to assume charge of the province ceded by the Nawab of Mustaphabad, and to introduce the blessings of British rule into the districts so long misgoverned by that unfortunate

prince. Such a request could not be refused ; and Cunningham, feeling that his daughter was more at home with the aunt who had been a mother to her for so many years, than she could be with the father who had now become little more than a name, and being, it must be confessed, now quite reconciled to his solitary life, had just proposed a scheme for completing his new task, and eventually retiring on the pension which he had now earned to join his sister and daughter in Italy, when the plan was upset by the news that Mrs Maitland had accepted the offer of marriage from an Italian nobleman. To Cunningham the idea of such a connection seemed thoroughly repulsive ; for although the Count was reported to be unexceptionable in every respect save that he was a good deal younger than his intended bride, Cunningham's Indian experiences were not calculated to remove the insular prejudices of an Englishman ; and notwithstanding that his sister wrote to him that her marriage should make no difference to Olivia, for that her future husband was equally desirous with herself that she should continue to make her home with them till her father returned from India, a sudden anxiety now possessed him lest his daughter, living in a

foreign household, should also fall in love with a foreigner and so be altogether lost to him. He determined, therefore, that she should join him for the remainder of his service ; and, writing to express his decision in terms so peremptory as seemed to the kind aunt a poor requital of the many years of loving care bestowed on his child, he knew scarcely an easy moment till he heard in reply that his instructions would be acted on at once. Mrs Maitland and Olivia made a speedy visit to England, in order that the latter might be placed in charge of the wife of a brother civilian returning to India ; and after a brief interval occupied in the preparation of Olivia's outfit, aunt and niece parted at Southampton with mutual tears and sorrowings, each to enter on a new life. The Count had followed his intended bride to London, and the marriage was to take place immediately after Olivia's departure, when the married pair would return to live in Italy. "Farewell, my darling child !" she said, folding her niece to her breast in the little cabin of the steamer, as it lay on the parting morning alongside of the quay in Southampton Docks ; "farewell, and for ever ! even if you don't marry in India, your father will never let you come to me again." Olivia could only reply

through her tears by returning the embrace; nor was there time for further words, for just at that moment rang the warning-bell, summoning those who were not passengers to leave the vessel.

Thus was Olivia launched upon her new life, of the personages moving around which she had as yet had only two slight glimpses. Some eight years before, Colonel Falkland, returning to England to recover from a wound, had paid a visit to Florence to see his god-daughter, then just entering on girlhood. He stayed there for some weeks, living at an hotel in the neighbourhood of Mrs Maitland's apartments, and passing the greater part of each day with his friends; and visitors in those days to the picture-galleries in that city could not but notice with interest the two sight-seers—the bronzed soldier-like man, who walked lame and with the aid of a stick, accompanied by the slight young girl; surely not his daughter, they thought, he seemed too courteous and deferential in manner, and she, though deferential in turn and striving to tend him with care, yet did not evince the familiarity of a child with a parent. The young lady acted as guide and interpreter, while her companion,

whose life had been spent in camps or the dull routine of an Indian official, was never tired of pursuing his first acquaintanceship with art under such auspices ; and when his young companion would bring him before some favourite masterpiece, his eyes would often turn involuntarily from the beautiful saint or madonna on canvas to the still more beautiful face, as he thought, lighted up with the rays of innocence and youthful enthusiasm.

In such companionship it seemed to Falkland as if a vision of his youth had come back again, unalloyed by the sadness and sorrow which marked that episode of earlier days. It is her mother come back to earth again, he said to himself ; God grant she may be spared to grace it longer ! Olivia and her aunt on their part had been prepared to receive their new acquaintance with warmth, as one holding the highest place in Mr Cunningham's esteem. The greatest friend I have in the world, he wrote to his daughter, and the finest soldier in the Indian army. " And the most perfect gentleman," declared Olivia's aunt with enthusiasm, after he had paid his first visit. " I thought Indian officers would be mere soldiers, with uncouth manners ; but our colonel

might be a prince, although I hope he will dress better when he gets to England, and take to wearing shirt-collars. Poor man! he seems to suffer a good deal from his wound, although he never complains. I think on the mornings when he comes in late, and won't take any breakfast, that he must have had a bad night." As for Olivia, who had never before met any gentleman, young or old, on intimate terms, and from whose girlish mind the germs of any tenderer emotions were absent, her godfather seemed the impersonation of all that was noble and dignified and kind. She would fain have asked him about the wars in which he had taken part, as the little party sate together of an afternoon or evening at Mrs Maitland's lodgings or rested by the wayside after a drive to some spot of interest in the neighbourhood; but Falkland was not a man to talk much about himself, or indeed to talk much about anything, and the conversation usually turned upon the travels and experiences of the ladies, Mrs Maitland taking the principal share, and the colonel merely throwing in an occasional question or remark by way of fuel to keep the fire alight. Or if Falkland and Olivia were alone, their talk would mostly revolve

about Olivia's pursuits and half-formed thoughts; for her new friend, while reserved about himself, was yet of a sympathetic nature which invited the confidence of others, although there was no want of humour or even a certain playful yet subdued sarcasm in his conversation. And had Olivia been capable of such analysis, she might have discovered that while she had opened to her new companion all the recesses of her young mind, she knew little about him save that he was kind, gentle, and unselfish, bent chiefly on ministering to the happiness of those around him. That the young girl should have endowed him with every noble attribute was a natural consequence of her being at the age of hero-worship. Thus when at last Falkland was obliged to bring his visit to an end, and to continue his journey towards England, the parting left Olivia with a new ideal of perfection to add to the gallery of saints and madonnas enshrined in the respect of her fervent young heart; while Falkland, although no definite ideas for the future yet possessed him, went off with a new interest in life awakened. The leave-taking was provisional only; for the plan was discussed of a meeting in the autumn on the Lake of Como,



when, said Falkland in his low voice, looking into her ingenuous young face with a kindly smile, as he held her hand at parting, his young mistress should go on with her course of instruction in Italian. But when autumn arrived, he was summoned to India to take up the important appointment which he now held; and the letter from the Governor-General himself containing the offer was a form of application for his services which a zealous public servant could not refuse to obey. So their next meeting was deferred till seven years later, when Olivia arrived at Mustaphabad, and the child-girl had developed into the beautiful young woman.

One other Indian acquaintance was made by Olivia, four years later, when Rupert Kirke, a lieutenant in the Bengal Army, arrived at Venice, where Mrs Maitland and her niece were then staying, also, like Falkland, on his way home. Kirke was first cousin to Cunningham and his sister, and brought an introduction from the former. "A clever fellow," said the brother, in his letter, "and a first-rate soldier, with a great future before him, if he only keeps straight." And indeed Rupert Kirke looked every inch a soldier, and although not the least

a lady's man, as the term is understood, was found to be excellent company ; well-mannered, well-dressed, well-read, and apparently both good-natured and good-tempered. Olivia took a great liking to her new-found relative, while Kirke for his part did not conceal his gratification in her society, nor, although he made little pretence of caring for pictures or churches, his enjoyment of the sight-seeing excursions made under her guidance—excursions, however, in which Mrs Maitland invariably joined, for Olivia was no longer a child. And after he had passed on to England, a correspondence was maintained between the two, when Kirke's clever letters came to be very interesting to the fair recipient. The elder lady, however, did not respond with warmth to the feelings of her companion about the letters and their writer. Without being a keen judge of character, there appeared something of hardness and apparent unscrupulousness about Kirke which instinctively repelled her ; and Olivia perceiving that her aunt did not share her admiration for him, did not seek to exchange confidences with her on the subject.

Kirke too, as well as Falkland, expressed the intention when leaving Italy of paying his rela-

tives another visit, but was diverted from carrying it into effect by the outbreak of the Crimean war, at the first rumour of which he set out for Constantinople, seeking employment as a volunteer with the Turkish army. In this capacity he seemed on the road to enhance his military reputation, when he was unfortunately tempted to accept a commission in the Turkish contingent, and thereby found himself shelved from active service during the remainder of the war, on the termination of which he was obliged to return to India.

To Olivia Cunningham, sailing for India, the change of life was even more complete than to the other young ladies who were borne in the same steamer with her out of Southampton Docks. They, for the most part, though leaving friends and homes behind them, had been brought up to regard England as a temporary resting-place, and the voyage to India as the culminating point in their girlhood. To Olivia this departure for that country came as the result of a sudden resolve, made necessary by the breaking up of European ties. Nor had she ever known the meaning of home as that term is

understood. For her it had not meant sisters and brothers, and home interests, and a settled dwelling-place. Her home, so far as she had been able to realise the idea, had been a suite of apartments at Florence, succeeded by a suite of apartments at Rome or Naples ; her friends had been passing visitors, acquaintances, foreigners and English, met and dropped ; and although the relation between her aunt and herself had been based on mutual love and affection, her heart could not but whisper when the former announced her coming change of life, involving a new and absorbing interest of her own, apart from her niece, that after all there must be a difference between a mother and even the kindest aunt ; henceforward, at any rate, their lives must run apart. Her father, on the other hand, had so far been a sort of shadowy providence watching over her from a distance, whose manifestations were mainly associated with punctual remittances, handsome presents, and brief, infrequent letters ; and whose very form and features were as yet unknown.

## CHAPTER XV.

So much as to the antecedents of the maiden who had arrived at Mustaphabad at the opening of our story, fancy free, although with two more or less dim ideals of the hero type in her imagination, looking with eagerness, but without much emotion, to the meeting with her father. As to Mr Cunningham, he was a man too much occupied with official duties and the business of the hour to practise mental analysis; but probably his feelings on the occasion were of a mixed nature, compounded of a pleasurable excitement at the expectation of greeting his beautiful young daughter, and a sense of dismay at the prospect of this invasion of his leisure and enforced alteration of his old-bachelor habits.

The first meeting between two persons who, though nearly related, are yet virtually strangers, ignorant of each other's thoughts, feelings,

and tastes, even of each other's past life—whose intercourse has consisted in the exchange of brief and formal letters, and who have had, so far, nothing in common but the interest and the affection born of a sense of duty—must needs be attended with more or less of restraint and embarrassment ; but Mr Cunningham's anxiety lest the first greetings should partake of the nature of a scene was at once dispelled by the tact and good taste of his daughter ; even the dust and fatigue of the journey could not do much to impair the charm of her appearance ; and as she stepped out of the carriage at the roadside station, whither he had gone to meet her, as already described, her father found her even more graceful and beautiful than the forerunning accounts had led him to expect ; and as Olivia, putting her arms round his neck, and kissing him, said, "So here we are at last ! it has been such a long journey ;" and then, turning to her maid who was alighting from the carriage behind, added, "Justine, this is my papa, who has come all this way to meet us,"—Cunningham felt that the scene of which he had been in dread had been escaped. And when, soon after they had started in the camel-carriage for the last stage of her

long journey, Oliva took his hand fondly, and leaning on his shoulder, said, "Papa, you look so young, it must seem quite odd to have a great big daughter like me,"—her father, responding warmly to the embrace, began to feel that it was not so dreadful a thing to have his daughter back after all. . Arrived at Mustaphabad, Olivia expressed herself as delighted with the Residency and all about it. The apartments which her aunt had at Florence were very large and fine, but they were nothing like the reception-rooms at the Residency—while her own rooms were charming; every want and comfort had been thought of and provided, and her father was able to say with satisfaction that all this had been newly arranged for her especial benefit. She was equally pleased with the gardens; the leaves in mid-winter, the multitude of squirrels and strange birds, even the familiar crows hopping about the edge of society with a view to pick up the stray crumbs left at the early breakfast taken in the veranda—all these novelties appeared full of interest for her, and her father experienced a sense of deep relief to find that his fears had been groundless lest she should prove to be a fine lady, spoiled for Indian life by foreign travel. A

silent man himself, and restrained from expressing much interest in her former life by a sense of indignation at what he considered his sister's misalliance, his shyness was soon dissipated by his daughter's sympathetic ways, as she thus rapidly identified herself with his interests and her new home. The Commissioner soon found that the cheerful breakfast-table with his daughter opposite to him was a great improvement on the solitary meal, dawdled over with a book, to which he had been accustomed ; still more when on his proposing to retire into another room before lighting his cigar afterwards, Olivia insisted on his smoking without rising. The obligatory dinner-parties which he used to dread seemed no longer the same dreary infliction. With his beautiful daughter acting as hostess, these solemn ordeals became comparatively lively ; the guests no longer appeared to be insufferably bored. The morning ride too, with her for a companion, was in pleasing contrast to the lonely ramble on horseback to which he had been accustomed ; he now got into the way of coming over from the court-house for luncheon, and even went the length of taking an occasional evening drive with Olivia in the new barouche which had



arrived for her use, a mode of amusement which no one had ever seen him indulge in before.

Such, then, was Olivia's new home, which, if it offered nothing that was not in unison with her gentle disposition, yet was not of a sort to develop the warmer feelings of her nature. Her life had been so far a happy one ; she had never known disappointment or sorrow, and so it continued to be ; but it was a life of chastened affection and without sentiment ; and at an age when most English girls in India are wives and mothers, the great romance of life had not even yet presented itself. With her, life had been made up of the study of art and the pursuit of amusement in sober fashion ; the graces more than the affections had been cultivated ; and so far the transfer to an Indian home had not caused a change. The relations between father and daughter were those of mutual respect and calm affection ; and a looker-on might have said that Miss Cunningham's disposition was one in which the effect of amiable temper was enhanced by polished manner, rather than one of deep feeling. Once only did her father step out of his usual reserve ; one day when his daughter

was in his room standing over him while he wrote a letter, he unlocked a drawer of his writing-table and took out a little picture-frame. "You may like to see that, my dear," he said, with face still turned downwards on his letter, and put it into her hands. It was the portrait of her mother, a poorly-executed affair in the stiff drawing of a native artist, but giving the impression of being a faithful likeness. "You are the very image of her," he said, after a short pause, in a low voice, while Olivia stood looking silently at the portrait, and then taking the case from her hands put it back again in the drawer. Olivia stooped down and kissed him on the forehead : he went on with his writing, and she left the room.

On one occasion only did her father show much animation on domestic matters. It happened a few days after she arrived. They were just rising from the breakfast-table, and Justine, who always took that meal with them, had left the room, when Olivia said, "I have had a letter this morning from cousin Rupert, papa."

"Cousin Rupert!" said her father, with surprise; "what do you know of *cousin* Rupert?" laying emphasis on the cousin.

"Why, papa, of course I know him very well; don't you remember that he came to Venice on his way home, when my aunt and I were staying there, and that you wrote to us about him?"

"True," replied the father, "I had forgotten that for the moment; but things have altered since then. I certainly did not think he would venture to write to you after what has happened. But it is just like him."

"What has happened, papa? Poor fellow! he speaks of being in trouble, but does not say what is the cause of it."

"I would rather not go into the story, my dear. It is a long business, and not a very pleasant one, where relationship is concerned; but I have given up all communication with him. However, it does not appear that he has acquainted you with the fact;" and Mr Cunningham spoke in a sarcastic tone, unlike his usual manner.

"But, papa," said Olivia, after a pause, "may there not be some misunderstanding which could be cleared up? So honourable a man as my cousin Rupert——"

"You are begging the question, Olivia. It is because I don't think your cousin Rupert is an

honourable man that our intimacy is broken off. You seem to think I have been hard on him," continued her father, seeing that Olivia looked unconvinced; "but I think you may give me credit for not having formed my opinion lightly. And if," he added in a lower voice, and turning away, "I am to suppose that he has taken advantage of your trustfulness to create a feeling for him which he knows I should disapprove, I should think still less favourably of him than I do already."

"Then, papa," said Olivia, looking down and blushing slightly, as he was moving from the room, "do you wish me not to send any answer to this?" and she held out the letter in her hand. "Will you not read it yourself, and see what he says?"

"No, my dear, thank you; I have no wish to see it, nor to dictate to you what you should do in regard to it. I am sure I may rely implicitly on your good sense and judgment in this as in all matters." And so saying, her father left the room.

Thus appealed to, Olivia had virtually no choice, and her cousin's letter remained unanswered; but it was with a sad heart that she

tried to reconcile her duty to her father's wishes with this neglect of her relative, and the struggle might have betrayed to herself the degree of interest with which he had inspired her. Till this time she had hardly been sensible how much of the pleasurable anticipations with which she had set out for India had been due to the prospect of meeting her cousin. And now to think that Rupert, who had always seemed in her young imagination the type of the noble, honourable soldier, should be as one whose name even was hardly to be spoken of. Some dreadful fault he must have committed for her father, usually so kind, to be thus sternly disposed towards him. Might it not be, however, that he had been misjudged? He said he had enemies who were bent on traducing his character. There must be some mistake! And yet her father spoke so positively, and he seemed kind and just in everything else. Thinking sadly over this, Olivia strove to stifle the romantic interest with which her cousin had inspired her; and what might readily have become a warmer feeling, if opportunity had been propitious, was now succeeded by a sentiment of pity.

The unanswered letter was as follows :—

“MY DEAR COUSIN,—It is so long since any letters have passed between us, that I ought not to be surprised if you did not recognise the handwriting of this one. Not that I judge by my own feelings in this respect, for I don't think I should fail to know yours wherever I might come across it; but we have both passed through many scenes since we met at Venice, and although my memory naturally clings to those pleasant hours, I could scarcely complain if you had forgotten them, especially as you were so much younger then—quite a girl, in fact! I suppose you must be a good deal altered—young people do change fast, don't they?—but at any rate it can be only in one direction. I wish I knew when there would be a chance of my being able to renew our acquaintance; but I have been in some trouble lately, and want to put myself right first with the world, especially with those whose good opinion I value most. It is a slanderous world, and I hope my cousin will not listen to the evil tales she may hear of one whose fault it has been to make enemies of those who can't bear that a younger man should understand his profession better than they do, and who values her good opinion before every-

thing else. I hope you will meet our mutual friend Colonel Falkland before long. He at any rate is the soul of honour ; and, standing well with him, who knows the facts of the case, I can afford to despise the slanders of those who repeat the scandals at second-hand of things they know nothing about.

“This is an egotistical letter, but if I began writing about Olivia herself I should never know when to stop asking questions. She will, I hope, anticipate my anxiety on this head, by giving me full particulars about herself, whenever she can find time to devote a few minutes to her old friend and relative.

“Pray give my remembrances to your father, if he cares to receive them, and believe me, my dear Olivia, always your affectionate cousin,

“RUPERT KIRKE.”

Then came the recognition at the ball, when Kirke wanted to make his way towards Olivia, and her father stopped him. To Olivia, witnessing the scene, there came up a reproach from her conscience that she was failing in her duty to her cousin ; a sense of wrong done in thus abandoning him replaced for the moment the

feeling, till then uppermost, that he was an unhappy man who was to be pitied for his fall through some unspeakable crime, and she thought with a penitent heart that she had been cowardly in not asking Colonel Falkland's aid on her cousin's behalf. The latter had spoken of Falkland as the one friend who still stood by him, and believed in his innocence. To him she would appeal to set her unfortunate cousin right.

These reflections, and no response to the emotion which had stirred poor Yorke's heart to its depths, as the foolish young fellow had fondly imagined, occupied Olivia's thoughts before she fell asleep on the night of the ball; and the opportunity for carrying out her purpose soon arrived. She meant to speak to Falkland during the day, after her father had gone to his court; but the subject came up at breakfast, being opened by Falkland himself, who said, addressing the Commissioner, just as Justine was quitting the room after despatching her share of the meal, "I forgot to mention that I had a letter from your cousin, Rupert Kirke, yesterday. He is coming to Mustaphabad immediately."



"He has arrived," replied Mr Cunningham, coldly ; "I thought you must have seen him at the ball last night."

Falkland looked surprised and as if awaiting further explanation, while Olivia with changed colour sat expectant. Her father, after a slight pause, went on, "He left the room at my instance, I believe. I said to him that as I had declined to have any further intimacy or communication with him, it would be better that he should not renew his acquaintance with Olivia ; and I must say so much for him that he had the good taste to act on my advice. But what brought him here I don't understand, knowing my sentiments."

"He comes to Mustaphabad to see the great man, while his camp is here, with a view to getting his case reopened."

"Did you advise the attempt, knowing the facts of his case ?"

"I cannot say that I actually advised him to do so : he had let the proper time go by for the only appeal he ought to have insisted on. My own opinion would have been for letting time have its effect, now that it is too late to demand a court-martial ; but I did not say anything to

dissuade him from making this personal appeal at once."

"Oh, Colonel Falkland," broke in Olivia, eagerly, "do say that you do not think so hardly of my cousin as papa does. He values your good opinion above everything, I know. It does seem a dreadful thing for the poor fellow to be cast off even by his friends in his troubles."

Falkland looked with surprise at the fair speaker, as she waited anxiously for his answer, for he did not know till then that she had thought at all about the matter. Then he said gravely, but with a kind smile—

"Your cousin has been very careless, no doubt, and there have been irregularities in this business which ought not to have occurred, and which no doubt bear a very unfavourable appearance; but I should think much worse of human nature than I do if I could believe that so gallant a soldier as Rupert Kirke were guilty of anything positively dishonourable."

"Oh, thank you for saying that!" cried Olivia, with fervour. "But why is it that he cannot get justice, poor fellow? Is there no way in which he can set himself right with the world?"

“A very sensible question, my dear, although you know nothing about the matter,” observed her father, lighting his cigar, which a servant had just brought, and looking up at the ceiling as he leant back in his chair. “Yes, he had the means of clearing himself, no doubt, by demanding a court-martial. If he was so highly honourable a man, and had nothing to fear from publicity, why did he not insist upon one being held upon him?”

“It was a grave error of judgment, no doubt,” observed Falkland, slowly; “he should not have left the decision in the matter to the Government; but having once made the mistake, it was perhaps too late to rectify it.”

“Well,” said the Commissioner, rising from the table, “I am very glad that Olivia should have some grounds for taking a more charitable view of the matter than I am able to do, and I am quite willing both you and she should think I am unreasonably hard about it;” and so saying he went to his own room, adding to himself — “but I believe I know a good deal more about some points of the affair than even you do, Falkland.”

“I am just going down to the cantonments,”

said Falkland to Olivia, when they were left alone, "and shall see your cousin this morning. In fact I am going there on purpose to see him. Shall I give him any message from you if he asks after you?"

"Thank you," she replied, warmly; "please say how heartily I grieve about this. But, no——" she continued, correcting herself, "it would hardly be proper to send him messages while papa's house is closed against him, would it?" and she looked up in his face asking for a reply.

"You are right, Olivia, in this as in everything; but I may at least say for you that he has your full sympathy in his troubles."

"Oh yes, please say all that, and my heartfelt wishes for happier days for him, poor fellow!" The love that might have been had now turned all to pity.

"She has grace and beauty enough to furnish twenty women," said the colonel to himself, as he stepped into his carriage, "and withal is as guileless and simple as a child."

"I have seen Kirke to-day," said Falkland in the evening, as the occupants of the Residency were strolling in the garden, "and his Excel-

lency gave him an interview, at which I was present. I am sorry to say the result was not satisfactory. The former holds out no prospect of reinstating him. Kirke returns to-night to his own station." No more passed on the subject.

This was the beginning of Falkland's brief and successful courtship. When, shortly after Olivia's arrival, he came to pay a promised visit of greeting to his godchild, his feelings were merely those of kindly interest, and curiosity to see how far she might have fulfilled the promise of her young girlhood. She, for her part, had merely an uncertain recollection of a person associated in her mind with middle age, whom she knew to be kind and good, and on whose friendship her father set a high value. Middle-aged he was, but the difference between them seemed no longer what it was when the slight girl in the broad-brimmed straw hat had led the grave soldier over the picture-galleries of Florence. Falkland was still grave and somewhat taciturn, although not without humour, but there was nothing of the old man about him. Erect, active, and soldier-like in habit, spare in diet, a student of books, and yet a busy public

man, he had outlived the egotism of youth without acquiring the hardness of age, while his unselfishness and sympathy for others rendered his society fascinating alike to old and young. With natives he was as popular as with Europeans. His servants plundered him freely after the fashion of their kind, and would have followed him to death. Young men sought his advice in trouble. Children found him out and took to him at once wherever he went. And after a two months' courtship, Olivia had accepted him for a husband.

The love was at first all on his side, and for some time he battled with the feeling, asking himself now and again if a weather-beaten old bachelor such as he, was fitted to make this beautiful and brilliant young creature happy; whether he would not be acting a wiser and less selfish part to withdraw from all competition for her hand, and leave her to find a mate among younger men. He had practised self-denial of the kind before and outlived the effort. Should he be less unselfish now that he was grown old? Olivia, for her part, made no secret of her liking for him, but her affection did not take the form of that young love which comes at some time to

most women. There were no restless misgivings, no anxious recallings of spoken words, no impatient waiting for the beloved one's return. In place of the tumultuous emotions that make up the first days of ordinary courtship—the doubts and hopes chasing each other through the heart—there was merely a feeling of confidence and admiration. His society made everything seem bright; whatever he said and did seemed best and wisest; with him she felt always more at ease than even with her father. Withal she could not but be affected by the unconscious flattery implied in the footing of equality on which so distinguished a man placed her. Yet all this was not love; and up to the time when Olivia and her father paid their visit to Falkland, shortly after his return to his own station, she had at most but dimly discerned the coming prospect; and when Falkland, one day when they were pacing his garden together, revealed an episode in his early life, telling her how in years gone by he had nourished a passionate affection for her mother, but, seeing that her heart was given elsewhere, had till now kept the secret of his love, so that not even the object of it had suspected its existence; and since she

could not be his had remained unwedded, till now the daughter seemed the mother of his youth come back to life in almost more than her own sweetness and grace ; and then, so much disclosed, asked, would that daughter intrust the keeping of her happiness to an old fellow like himself, young in heart if old in face?—when Falkland spoke thus, the avowal took Olivia by surprise, although, had she analysed her feelings, she must have known that their intimacy had gone beyond the bounds of mere friendship. But her answer was given without doubt or misgiving, for it seemed called from her by feelings of admiration and respect for him, mingled with the humility which marked her character. Placing her hand in his she turned on him a glance of her sweet face, and with a trustful smile said she would endeavour to deserve and return his love.

The Commissioner, when the news was announced to him the same evening, was equally surprised and delighted, and it at once determined him to a resolve which he had been thinking of making for some days past—namely, to take leave to Europe at once, instead of trying to patch up his failing health by a visit to



the hills. Nor would he hear of Olivia returning with him, as she proposed to do, indefinitely postponing the time of her marriage. "He was not so ill as to require nursing," he said; adding jocosely, "that his old friend had been a bachelor so long he could not afford to be kept waiting any longer." Truth to say, Cunningham rather preferred the idea of travelling home comfortably alone, stopping and moving as he pleased, with no one to consider but himself, to being accompanied even by his daughter, so that his determination involved less sacrifice than she supposed.

Official changes are soon arranged in India when brought about by sickness. The same post which carried to Cunningham the sanction of Government for leave to Europe on medical certificate, conveyed also the notification of Falkland's appointment to officiate as Commissioner of Mustaphabad during his absence—an announcement which, while shattering the hopes Captain Sparrow had indulged in of obtaining the preferment, was received with general satisfaction by the official world, Falkland being universally recognised as the fittest man to succeed to this important and lucrative post. Cun-

ningham and his daughter returned forthwith to Mustaphabad to make the needful arrangements for their respective changes in life—arrangements easily accomplished, for Falkland took over the Residency furniture, carriage, and horses in block, and Miss Cunningham's ample outfit, still in its first freshness, rendered the need but small for a special bridal *trousseau*. The hot winds were now setting in apace, and it behoved Cunningham to start as soon as possible for Calcutta, if he would escape ill consequences from the journey. Accordingly, one day in April, Falkland arrived at Mustaphabad and took up his quarters for the night at the house of his old friend Mackenzie Maxwell, the civil surgeon. The following morning he received charge of the Commissioner's office, and the day was passed by the two friends at the court-house in the matter-of-fact occupation of discussing the various business matters of the duty to be taken over, and signing the needful transfer papers. Towards sunset the wedding took place at the cantonment church, after which the newly-married couple and the guests invited to witness the ceremony, comprising all the residents of the station who had not gone off for

the summer to the hills, repaired to Brigadier Polwheedle's house, the Residency being too far off for the purpose, and there partook of ices and champagne, according to approved custom. At dusk, Mr Cunningham set off on his long journey, the Nawab's camel-carriage being again put in requisition for the first part of it ; while Falkland and his bride drove home to the Residency.

Thus was our sweet Olivia mated, and all her friends and acquaintances pronounced it a happy marriage on both sides. And indeed with a husband gallant, clever, and unselfish, gentle and kind in his ways, and whose devotion and solicitude were evinced in every word and action, how could the young wife help being happy ? And must not she love dearly in return a husband so good and noble, a husband of whom any woman might be proud ? And yet—had she asked herself, is this really love ? it would have been difficult to frame a true reply. She was always happy in his presence ; no doubts or regrets came up to disturb the first placid days of wedded life ; but the well-known foot-step sounding in the hall raised no responsive throb in Olivia's gentle bosom, nor did the hours of enforced absence pass with weary longings for

return. Olivia had been accustomed to spend many hours of the day alone ; and now with Justine for company—Justine who had returned to the Residency after a short visit to Mrs Polwheedle—she could still employ the long mornings happily till her husband returned from his duties at the court-house. At times, indeed, would come up unbidden questionings whether another fate might not have been hers, and a sorrowful regret that her cousin should be cast off and forsaken, undeserving of affection though he might be ; but any gentle doubts of this sort were dismissed whenever they arose, as unworthy tenants of her thoughts.

To the residents of Mustaphabad feeling a pleasurable interest in or indifference about Miss Cunningham's marriage, it needs hardly be said that there was one exception. And, crushed down by the sudden destruction of the hopes which the foolish young fellow had allowed himself to build on utterly unsubstantial foundation, poor Yorke had not even the bitter consolation of feeling that he had been the victim of heartless coquetry. He could not carry his self-deception so far as to delude himself into the belief that Miss Cunningham had knowingly jilted him.

He now saw plainly enough that her supposed encouragement of his love had existed only in his own imagination. Calling up over and over again each moment of the brief interviews which made up his acquaintance with Olivia, his sense of truthfulness and natural humility now brought him to see clearly enough that her feelings towards him had been free throughout from the emotions they caused in him, that her kind manner was dictated merely by a kind heart. There had been no eagerness, no shyness in Miss Cunningham's greetings. All the heart-flutterings had been on one side only. So much the young man had learnt of the language of love. And amid the despair he felt at the downfall of his hopes, he could not but admit to himself that the choice she had made was, after all, a more natural and proper one. What right had he, an obscure penniless subaltern, to aspire to gain that peerless creature for a wife? And for all his being a few years older, he felt as if he must always have looked up to her, and she down to him. Now Falkland was one whom every woman as well as every man must look up to; and her proper place would be as mistress of a great household. Fool that he was, to dream that she

could ever come to share his lowly home! And yet, Falkland could never love her as he had loved her; she would never know as his wife the passionate devotion of which she deserved to be the object.

But from one disaster, at least, he had been spared. He had never, with all his folly, been fool enough to make his infatuation public. None of their acquaintance except Spragge could have a suspicion of it; and Jerry, though a harebrained fellow, was a stanch friend who would not peach. Even Olivia herself did not know his secret. But no! surely, he thought, she must have guessed his devotion, expressed in every way but speech. At least, however, he had been spared the humiliation of a confession rejected. And yet, he thought, it would have been sweeter to have been refused by her, than that she should never know my love, my love now to remain a secret for ever.

But although the young man had strength of will to hide his grief, and unselfishness enough to feel no anger with the woman who had made such wild work with his heart, life for the time seemed utterly intolerable, especially while the coming wedding was the universal topic of con-

versation throughout the station. To listen to this was more than he could bear; and obtaining a month's leave, Yorke set out with his tent to pass the time in wandering about the district. The shooting season and the time for camp-life was over; the harvest had been gathered in, leaving the bare sandy fields a desert; the hot winds blew clouds of stifling dust from morning to sunset, till his tent was like a furnace, and chairs, table, and bed, and even his food, were covered with the loose grit that filled the air; and the antelope which he pursued over the open plains were shy and wild; but he could at any rate tire himself out with walking; the nights in the open air were still cool, and sleep could be courted by sheer force of fatigue. Thus passed the weary time. Fain would he have taken leave for the whole hot season, and spent it wandering amid cool air and new scenes in the Himalayas; but with certain obligations already mentioned to be met shortly, he could not afford to give up the allowance of the two companies which he commanded. Hill stations and pleasant places, he thought bitterly, were not meant for such as he. More fitting that he should nurse his sorrow in bodily discomfort.

But even in the solitude of his little camp he could not altogether escape contact with the outer world. The occasional messenger who came out from cantonments with his letters brought a newspaper one evening, and spelling through this after his frugal dinner, beginning with the advertisements, as is the wont of solitary travellers in the East, he came upon the following announcement:—

“April 15th, at Mustaphabad, by the Rev. J. Wharton, M.A., Colonel Robert Falkland, C.B., to Olivia, daughter of Archibald Cunningham, Esquire, Civil Service.”

So, then, even the last despairing hope must be surrendered which had found a place in his foolish heart during these solitary days, that the whole story of the engagement might prove to be a horrid dream, or that something might happen at the last moment to break off the marriage. Life must now be faced under its new conditions, and it would be mere cowardice to shirk it any longer. So determining, the young man returned to cantonments next morning without waiting for the expiration of his leave, and resumed his place in the regiment.



## CHAPTER XVI.

FOR poor Yorke, returning to Mustaphabad from his pilgrimage in camp, on learning that Olivia was actually married, the outward circumstances of the time were eminently calculated to foster the desire which possessed him to be miserable. He could not, indeed, but admit feeling a pleasurable sensation on finding a well-thatched roof over his head again, and doors to keep out the dust; but life at Mustaphabad was very dismal, and the prospect of living through the monotony of the long hot season seemed, in his temper of mind, utterly dreary. There was nothing to work for, nor work of any sort to be done. Drills were over, and everybody who could get away on any excuse had gone to the hills; some to remain there till October,—others, including Spragge, on sixty days' leave—at the end of which time it might be hoped the first fall of

rain would have restored parched nature and somewhat abated the heat. A few minutes passed in the sepoys' lines at daybreak sufficed to dispose of all regimental business, when such of the officers as were present with the regiment assembled to drink tea on the shady side of the mess bungalow, and discuss the extremely small points of interest offered by the local papers, being chiefly tantalising accounts of picnics and cricket-matches at the hill stations, till the advancing sun came over the roof and drove them to the shelter of their respective houses. By this time it would be about seven o'clock. Then the doors are closed to keep out the rising, dust-laden wind, and the solitary occupant of his bungalow has to get through the long day as best he can, trying to read books in which he feels no interest, perhaps trying to kill the hours by sleep, till the western wall of the station racquet-court throws enough shade over it to allow of the players assembling there. This, and the plunge in the station bath, which lies handy to the court, and whither the players' servants repair at sunset with their masters' changes of raiment, is the only part of the day worth living for, the evening mess-dinner being an ordeal to

be dreaded, for by this time the different members of the mess have completely thrashed out each other's ideas. "Is this life," thought Yorke, riding slowly to the mess through the dusk, one evening after his bath—"is this life to last for ever? Each day so long to spend, so short to look back upon! And this is called a military career! Even study is impossible. I can read no longer for reading's sake—shall I never find any useful work to do?" Nor was his frame of mind made more contented by a letter received that day with the English mail, distributed to the station during the afternoon, which his servant had brought down to the bath-house, and which Yorke read as he dressed after his plunge. It was from his only sister, who lived with his mother in the small but favourite cathedral town of Wiltonbury, and, as usual, was full of the exciting news which such a residence was calculated to supply; the most important item being the arrival of a new incumbent to a proprietary chapel of the town, whom both mother and daughter had met at a tea-party on the previous evening. "He is such a beautiful preacher," said the fair writer, "and evidently a real Christian, which is more than can be said for all the

clergymen of the Close, whose service, as Mr Morgan says, is so much of the senses and so little from the heart. But he prays that his ministrations here may be blessed for good, in the whole place as well as in his parish. He expressed great interest about you, and hoped your profession would not dispose you to worldly-mindedness, but said that temptation was often a means of grace. Indeed, he told us a most interesting anecdote after tea about a young officer, belonging to the Indian army I think he said, who drank himself to death, leaving a wife and six children quite penniless, but whose death-bed was beautifully touching—so much repentance, and such perfect trust and thankfulness to fall asleep. And oh ! my dearest Arthur, when I think of all the temptations you are exposed to in the dissipations of an Indian cantonment, with its gaiety and elegant mess-rooms and billiard-tables and smoking, I often tremble lest they should be too great a burden for you to bear. But, as Mr Morgan says, we must put our trust above, and all will be for the best.

“We have had a sad example here, which brought you very forcibly to our minds. Young Johnny Mills, who had such a splendid opening

in the County Bank, has become dreadfully dissipated ; they say he is to be seen standing about the Red Lion at all hours of the night, and then late in coming in to business in the morning, till the manager has threatened to dismiss him if he is late again. Poor Mrs Mills and the girls are in dreadful trouble about him. As mamma truly says, it seems quite providential now he was not allowed to carry his attentions further. And now, my ever dearest brother, with heartfelt prayers for your happiness in this world and the next, ever your fondly attached sister,

“REBECCA YORKE.”

“This may be a scene of trial, if not exactly of temptation,” thought the young man, with a bitter smile, as he looked round the mess-table after the cloth was removed, and surveyed the company—Major Dumble the commandant in the centre, with his hookah, last relic of a by-gone age, and his tumbler of cold brandy-and-water, the rest with cigars, and the black bottles before them containing such portions of beer as remained over from dinner ; Brevet-Major Passey, who was living *en garçon* at the mess, his wife and daughter having gone to the hills ;

Grumbull, the doctor, doing likewise in the absence of his family in England, with a guest seated by him, a young medical friend, who was passing through Mustaphabad on his way to join his regiment; Captain Braddon puffing his cigar, grim and silent; Braywell, the only other lieutenant present; Ensign Dobson, and little Johnny Raugh, the junior of his grade, who had just been appointed to the regiment, and was greatly impressed with a sense of the fastness of military life as typified by the 76th N.I. The servants had left the room, dimly lighted by oil-wicks in glasses attached to the bare whitewashed walls, and the punkah, pulled by a sleepy man in the veranda, flapped languidly to and fro.

"Well, boys," said Major Dumble, a large, stout man, looking round the table with an amiably stupid expression on his face, "what's the news to-day?"

"Can't expect any news, major," replied Dobson, "in this awful dull place. Dullest station ever was in, I think," added the young man, yawning—"wish the hot weather were over."

"Well, I rather like the hot weather," observed the major, blandly; "there's no drill, for one thing." Here a languid smile possessed the

company, all except the visitor, who did not take the joke ; and the major recovering himself added, "At least drill in moderation is very well, but I must say I enjoy the long days ; plenty of time to one's self, and no interruptions. I like to have time to turn round in."

As Major Dumble was known not to possess a book in his house, save the Bengal Army List and the Military Pay Code, and was not burdened with correspondence of any sort, his day in his bungalow must unquestionably have afforded him ample time wherein to perform that operation. But it was generally understood that the worthy commandant of the 76th distributed his time pretty equally between refreshing naps, discussing bazaar gossip with his servants, and feeding his poultry, the major being a connoisseur in fowls, and supplying his surplus stock in a friendly way to the mess at cost price.

"Oh, it's all very well for you, major," continued Dobson, "who have all the business of the regiment to look after, but I'm blessed if I can get half-an-hour's work a-day out of my company. These hot-weather days are disgustingly long ; I almost wish sometimes there was

a little drill going on, to kill time and give a fellow a little exercise."

"You should play racquets," observed Braddon; "you are sure to go to the bad if you eat three heavy meals a-day and don't take exercise."

"Oh, I can't be bothered with racquets," replied the ensign; "it's too much trouble, and makes one so hot."

"Ah yes, these military gentlemen find all play and no work a little tedious," said Grumbull to his friend; "but we medical officers have to work away just the same all the year round; hot weather or cold, no holiday for us."

"How many men have you got in hospital now, doctor?" asked Braddon.

"It isn't the number of patients that make the work," replied Grumbull; "it's the system. One must visit the hospital morning and evening, and all the routine has to be gone through just the same whether the hospital is full or empty; returns to be filled in, and stores to be counted, and all the rest of it. They turn us medical officers into regular clerks," he continued to his friend, "as you will find when you come to have medical charge of a regiment."

"Yes, it is quite like cutting grindstones



with razors," said Braddon ; "you ought to have a secretary, at the least, to keep the medical accounts of the regiment, so that you might give your undivided attention to your five sick patients. That is the number in to-day's return, I think."

"You are very satirical, as usual," replied Grumbull ; "but I think when a man has had a scientific education and taken a university degree, he might be trusted to issue an ounce of quinine, or a scrap of lint, without filling up a return in duplicate."

"Ah, I can't go with you there, doctor," broke in the major ; "where you have stores, there you must in course have returns,—else how are you to audit ? As old Counter, the late auditor-general, a precious long-headed fellow he was too, used always to say, 'Show me a voucher, and then I shall know where I am.' Why, bless me !" continued Dumble, with enthusiasm, as reminiscences of his former occupation crowded upon his memory, "when I was in the pay department, I have had as many as five hundred vouchers passing through my office in a week ; and never an arrear of any sort, either, everything audited up to within fifteen months of date."

"So you are a university man," said the young guest of the evening to his host; "Edinburgh, I suppose?"

"No, Aberdeen."

"Ah, well, no doubt, a university degree is a very nice thing—it gives a stamp to a man, so to speak; but I think nowadays the rising men in the profession go more to the London hospitals, and come out as M.R.C.S. That is what I did myself. There are so many openings, you see, for a fellow who makes a name for himself in the hospitals—dresserships and clinical lectureships, and what not. Both Fiston and Thelusson wanted me to stop on in London," added the young man, modestly, "but I was anxious to see something of the world, and to investigate some forms of tropical diseases, so I took an assistant-surgeonship. I am very anxious myself to get some experience of cholera, for example. Where is one likely to meet with it, do you think?"

"You need be under no anxiety on that score, sir," said Braddon; "you will find it very accommodating and ready to wait upon you wherever you are."

"By the way," said the young medical man,

turning to his host, "Have you read O'Hara on Cholera? Just out, you know, published by Churchill & Co."

"No, I haven't," replied Grumbull; "and, what is more, I don't mean to. I don't want O'Hara or anybody else to tell me what cholera is,—me a man who has been twenty years in the country."

"I suppose, then, you go in for the germ theory?"

"No, I don't believe in germs (Dr Grumbull pronounced this word as if it were spelt jurrums), or any newfangled stuff of the sort. Look here, my good sir," he continued, bringing down his hand with a thump on the mess-table, "you have cholera on the plains of Bengal, and you have cholera on the highlands of Thibet, fifteen thousand feet above the sea, haven't you? Well, then, I say, isn't the thing as plain as a pike-staff? It's the variations of temperature that cause cholera, of course, and I don't care what anybody else says."

"The cholera is an awful thing when it breaks out in a European regiment," observed the major, after a pause.

"Have you ever served with a European

regiment, sir ?" asked the stranger, turning towards him.

"No, sir ; and never wish to. The European soldier is a queer customer sometimes, I can tell you. I heard once of a man in the old Die-hards ; the captain of his company was finding fault with him because his knapsack wasn't straight, and he turned round and bawled out, 'I haven't got eyes in the back of my head, have I?' Now no sepoy would have answered his officer like that."

"Ah, and do you remember that story of Poynings and the European gunner at the siege of Bhurtpore ?" said Major Passey, a small weather-beaten old fellow, with a red face and white hair, who had remained silent up to this point.

"Ah, what a fine man Poynings was !" continued the commandant. "He exchanged out of the 19th Lancers when they went home in 1832, into the 23d Dragoons."

"No, the 22d Dragoons," said Passey, in correction ; "the 23d went home in '33."

"Ay, so it was. Poynings was commanding the 22d at Cawnpore, when we were there in 1834. He would sit at mess over the bottle till

gunfire the next morning, and then his charger would be brought to the door, and he would ride off to parade as steady and fresh as if he had been in bed all night. He was a man of very good family, too, was Poynings ; he had a cousin an Irish peer. Ah, those were fine times ! wheat was down then to forty seers, and you might keep a horse for five rupees a-month. The 22d lost a hundred men from cholera that very year."

"Ah, what a splendid corps the 22d was !" observed Passey, after a pause, by way of keeping up the conversation.

"It was indeed," said the Major. "Cawnpore was a fine station in those days for a young fellow to learn his duty at ; brigade parades and grand guard-mounting regularly once a-month, all through the cold weather. Old General Mudge was commanding the division. He died in 1836. It was thought he would have got into Council if he had lived."

"Wasn't it Mudge who had the row with Poynings, because he inspected the 22d in his carriage ?" asked Passey.

"Yes, to be sure, so it was. Mudge couldn't ride, you know ; he had been in the stud depart-

ment for a great many years; but he spoke the language like a native. Only fancy, he was a regimental field-officer when Lord Lake was commander-in-chief."

"There's a fine picture of Lord Lake at Government House in Calcutta," observed Passey.

"Ay, and of Warren Hastings too," continued the major. "When I entered the service, the colonel of my battalion (we were the second battalion of the 38th then) had known Warren Hastings. He remembers seeing him arrive at Calcutta from up-country, and get out of his palanquin, with silk stockings on, and buckles on his shoes. Only think, silk stockings and buckles in a palanquin! Dear me! what changes one sees in dress, to be sure!" continued Dumble, philosophically. "How do you like the new tunic, Passey?"

"Have there been many changes in the uniform of the army since you entered the service, major?" asked young Raugh, to whom the subject of dress was one at present of leading interest, and to whom it had been a blow and disappointment, on joining the regiment a few weeks before, to find that the officers had already taken to white jackets, and that there would be

no opportunity of airing his brand-new scarlet coatee till the next cold season.

“Changes! I believe you,” replied his commanding officer. “Why, when I went to wait on the Marquess of Hastings on first arrival, with a letter of introduction—it was from Hambrowe & Co., the great wine merchants—they supplied his lordship; my father used to get his wine from them too, and very good wine it was;—well, when I waited on Lord Hastings, he was sitting at his desk in full uniform, with his cocked-hat on the table before him—and that in the middle of the hot weather too!”

“Ay,” said Passey, in support of this statement, “I can remember, too, when I came out—that was in Lord Amherst’s time—the adjutant-general used to sit in his office in uniform all day.”

“Oh yes! Lord Amherst, he was a good governor-general enough,” said Dumble, a little testily, as if impatient at this interruption to the logical sequence of his thoughts; “but he wasn’t nearly so fine-looking a man as Lord Hastings. Lord Hastings was commander-in-chief as well as governor-general, and commanded in the Mahratta campaigns. Then

there was Lady Hastings too. She was a countess in her own right."

"Talking of campaigns," broke in Braywell, whose comparative youth had prevented him from taking a share in these interesting reminiscences, and who had been maintaining his enforced silence with visible impatience,—“talking of campaigns—it is just a year since we finished the Sontalia campaign."

"Was your regiment in the Sontalia campaign, sir?" asked the young surgeon.

"No, not the regiment," replied Braywell; "I was there on the staff—baggage-master to the right column; and precious little I have got for it either. Here I am back again on regimental duty; might just as well have never gone down there. Yes; this was the very day of the battle of Deoghur, and a very hot affair it was."

"Must have been," observed Braddon, "with the hot winds blowing."

"You're such a fellow for chaff, Braddon," remonstrated Braywell; "you know what I mean perfectly well. I was on the right of the line, with the brigadier; there was a detachment of the 84th N.I. there, and things were looking



awkward. The jungle was so thick you couldn't see twenty yards ahead of you, and the arrows and spears were coming in like paint. I never saw anything like it. Our fellows were at it for about four hours, and must have fired full fifty rounds or more before the enemy gave way. They were there in swarms, but not a man showing himself, the crafty villains—most determined fellows—and their arrows coming in like paint——”

“Was anybody in the gallant detachment killed or wounded?” asked Braddon.

“Their arrows coming in like paint——,” continued Braywell, too intent on the pleasure of securing a new listener to heed the interruption.

“Oh, confound it! I can't stand this,” said Braddon in a low voice to Yorke—“we have had this fifty times before; come along and have a cigar outside.” So saying, he rose from the mess-table, and Yorke followed, leaving the two veterans dozing over their brandy-and-water—young Raugh sitting opposite to Braywell, with wide-open eyes, listening with unabated attention to the oft-told tale of the battle of

Deoghur, while the young assistant-surgeon, leaning back in his chair, and running his hand through his fine head of hair, was also attending with as much interest as could reasonably be expected from a scientific mind occupied for the moment with mere military topics.

## CHAPTER XVII.

YORKE had of late become somewhat intimate with Braddon. The latter was a disappointed man; remanded not long before from the head-quarter staff to regimental duty; and his temper, soured by the misfortune which had marred a career of promise, rather jumped with the young man's present frame of mind. Yorke indeed was the only man in the regiment who saw anything of Braddon except on duty or at the mess, and he would often pass some of his long hours in the other's bungalow, in desultory talk or reading the books with which Braddon was well supplied. It was, however, only during the day that they met. Braddon usually passed his evenings alone, and although no one in the regiment had ever seen him the worse for drink, rumour had it that the vice which it was supposed had been the cause of his downfall was

becoming a confirmed habit, and that he seldom went sober to bed. On the present occasion, however, Braddon proposed a move into his compound, where on the gravel space before the veranda were a couple of lounging-chairs and a low table with bottles and glasses, and seating himself, invited his companion to take a cheroot and glass of brandy-and-water, Yorke accepted the cheroot, but declined the other refreshment, and the two began talking.

The conversation turned naturally on late events and the temper of the army, for already there had been hangings and disbandments. At the mess-table the subject was avoided, because some of the servants understood English; but in private little else was now talked about.

“Braywell, after all, is no worse than others with his tomfoolery about hot fire, and gallant conduct, and the rest of it,” observed Braddon at one point of the conversation. “It is merely what he has been brought up to. Look at the way in which Lord Ellenborough belauded the troops which did not surrender in Affghanistan or had the pluck to face the enemy in the open. That wasn’t the way old Lord Lake and the Duke went to work. We have gone on pamper-

ing and buttering up the sepoy whenever he does his duty, till really one might suppose it was the recognised business of a soldier to run away, and quite a surprising and creditable circumstance if he does not. Every little skirmish, too, nowadays is magnified into a great battle."

"Still we had our real battles too," said Yorke. "Surely there has seldom been harder fighting anywhere than in the Sutlej campaign."

"But the sepoys did run away then; at any rate a great many of them did, and a good many Europeans too. For the matter of that, Europeans know how to run away very freely sometimes, but then there is this difference between them and the sepoy, that they are always thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and ready to come up to the scratch again fresher than ever; but at the end of the first day at Ferozeshah the sepoys had got the heart pretty well taken out of them; Lord Hardinge clubbed what European troops he could get together next morning and went in at the enemy; and if that handful of men had not been game, we should have been driven out of the country. There were no reserves to speak of."

“And yet the sepoys have fought well at times.”

“Yes, and will fight well again if kept in order. The sepoy is a brave fellow enough—no man faces death, as a rule, with more indifference when he is in the humour; but you can’t expect mercenary troops to fight properly without discipline.”

“But don’t you think the discipline, on the whole, is good? Where would you find less crime in an army, or better conduct?”

“Well, they don’t drink,” said Braddon, bitterly, “and so have no cause to misbehave; and they are obedient enough, no doubt, so long as you don’t give them any orders.”

“How not give them any orders?”

“Oh, of course, so long as you give them any customary orders, which they think proper, they will obey you readily enough. If a parade is ordered for to-morrow morning, I daresay you will find all the men there. But tell them to do anything they don’t like—to intrench themselves on a campaign, for example, or to use a new kind of cartridge, or to march to a bad part of the country out of their turn—and then see the sort of fashion in which you are obeyed. It wasn’t

so long ago that our own noble regiment refused to go on a campaign for the precious reason that they had just come off a campaign. Or meet the sepoy of another regiment off duty, and see if he treats you as a soldier should behave to an officer. No ; discipline has departed from the Bengal army this long time, and small blame to it. Everybody in office, from the governor-general and commander-in-chief downwards, has been doing his best for years past to undermine it, taking away power from commanding officers in one direction, and adding privileges in the other, till there is nothing left to hang any discipline upon, and the wonder is that the machine keeps together at all. Your commanding officers are mere dummies to take charge of the parade and draw a certain amount of pay ; just as well perhaps that they are no more, considering the sort of creatures some of them are. Poor old Dumble, for example, isn't exactly the sort of man to put much responsibility upon."

"But how is it that the authorities are blind to this state of things, if it is so bad as you make out?"

"They are not blind ; at any rate, not all of them. Lord Hardinge, who was a thorough

soldier if ever there was one, saw plainly enough what a rotten state we were in. One day after the battle of Sobraon, when the staff were talking rather freely about the behaviour of certain regiments, he turned round and said—I was about headquarters, then, you know : ‘ I can tell you what, gentlemen—the next enemy you will have to fight is your own army.’ And his words will come true, if we don’t look out.”

“ Then do you really think there is any danger of the whole army ever turning against us ? ”

“ I don’t know exactly about that. The native officers and the old soldiers will hardly be such fools as to throw up their pensions, and then the Hindoos and Mussulmans wouldn’t care to row in the same boat, so that there are a good many chances in our favour ; but I confess I should like to see every native regiment cut down to eight hundred strong, and half-a-dozen more European regiments ordered out.”

Yorke noticed that while they were talking, Braddon had more than once filled his glass. This was the first time he had been witness to the habit in which it was suspected by the regiment that the latter indulged, and he would fain have interposed with a word of caution and re-



monstrance. But a sense of delicacy restrained him at first, and now his companion was beyond remonstrance. His voice had become thicker; and when, a few minutes later, Yorke got up to go away, he was becoming indistinct in his utterance and loud in his denunciation of the authorities; and the young man went off to his bungalow sad at heart at witnessing the falling away of his brother officer, good soldier and clever man as he was, and with the latter's forebodings about the future of the army still in his ears. Braddon and Falkland had used almost the same words. Was, then, the confidence he had expressed to Miss Cunningham in the loyalty of his regiment a mere foolish infatuation, as baseless as his dream of gaining her love?

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEW more idle days were passed in the torpor of heat and false security, before the great storm broke out, engulfing at once very many of the small European communities in India scattered over the country, surprised and defenceless, while others were suffered for a time to endure only the bitterness of expectation. Rumours of the outbreak at Meerut and Delhi reached Mus-taphabad in a few hours, and to the horror and indignation aroused by the first news, there soon followed unspeakable dread and suspense as the tidings came from one station after another of treacherous risings and murder and anarchy, and those who had so far escaped felt that the same catastrophe might at any moment overtake themselves. Here, as in every place where there were both white and black troops, the gravity of the situation was vastly aggravated

by the difficulty of framing a plan of action ; for to make preparations might have been to accelerate the outbreak. And the position of the officers of the native regiments was peculiarly embarrassing ; for while they seemed to be regarded by the rest of the community as if in some way unwittingly the cause of the calamity, and shared for the time the odium aroused by the misconduct of the sepoy in other places, they for their part were not only precluded by their position from taking the precautions which the other European residents made, against a treacherous outbreak of their men ; they would also certainly be the first victims. Right bravely, however, they faced the danger, professing unlimited confidence in their men—a confidence which, whatever they felt, they exemplified by sending their beds down to the parade-ground and sleeping there unarmed in front of the men's huts on the edge of the plain, the armed sentries marching to and fro beside them. And at times, indeed, when talking to the men—men who had never before been otherwise than docile and respectful—it seemed impossible to doubt their protestations of loyalty, their declarations even of detestation at the conduct of the regiments

which had mutinied, and their professions of eagerness to be led against the common enemy. And yet a change had come over them which could not but be observed—a certain sullenness of manner, a look as if of suspicion that they were suspected, which the officers in vain endeavoured by their own appearance of confidence to ignore. Nobody else, however, expressed any confidence in the sepoys, or hesitated to avow the expectation that sooner or later they would follow the example of the mutineers elsewhere; and the officers of the hussars and European artillery were all for marching down on the native lines and disarming the sepoys by force, with sabres and grape *ad libitum* if the latter should show their teeth; and Brigadier Polwheedle, who was ready to hear advice from every one who offered it, although quite unable to make up his mind about it, received numerous proposals to this effect from the self-constituted critics of the situation; for military etiquette had disappeared for a time under the first excitement of the crisis, and people walked in and out of the brigade office as if it were a tap-room. The brigadier, however, at this juncture was disabled from active duty by a fall

from his grey cob, which had happened three weeks before, causing fracture of the small bone of the leg ; and the command of the station practically devolved on Colonel Tartar. Tartar was a man of decision ; but while the European force at his disposal consisted only of cavalry and artillery, he was desirous of avoiding extreme measures which might precipitate an outbreak of so large a body of sepoys. In ten days a regiment of European infantry and another of Ghoorkhas, with a supply of ammunition, would arrive at Mustaphabad, when it was his intention to disarm the native regiments, and then, having made his rear safe, to march with the remainder of his force to what was now the seat of war. Meanwhile the needful measures were hurried on for taking the field, and all the soldiers' wives and children were sent off in bullock-carts to the hills, under escort of the few European soldiers who were not fit for active service, and a detachment of the Nawab's troops, who were believed to be stanch. Most of the married officers took advantage of the opportunity to send off their families also.

During this time the outward aspect of the place remained unchanged ; during the day-time

the roads bore the same deserted aspect as usual, and the fierce hot wind had them to itself, while at sunset the residents took their customary ride or drive along the mall. But in the European barracks the guards were strengthened, and strong pickets were always on duty, while the hussars and artillery horses stood saddled in their stables. The miscellaneous European residents were all privately warned to make their way to the hussar barracks if any firing should be heard ; and a cordon of observation was drawn between the European and native lines, the officers of the native regiments remaining alone with their suspected sepoys. Their tents were pitched with those of the men on the regimental parades, for the native regiments had been formally warned that they were to make part of the field force, and the officers had sent their baggage to the camp and slept there every night ; but they still spent the days in their bungalows to avoid the fierce May heat, and dined in their respective mess-houses—for even among men expecting to be murdered, the formalities of life must be gone through. Ten weary, dreary days. In the European quarters there was plenty to be done, for the camp equipment of Europeans is multi-

farious, and hot-weather campaigning-clothes had to be improvised ; but the sepoy's wants are simple and few, and after the tents were duly pitched and camels provided for carrying them, there was little remaining to be done ; and the days passed slowly enough for the officers in their bungalows, now looking cheerless and dismantled, or in the mess-house discussing such items of news as found their way to Mustaphabad despite interrupted posts and telegraphs—news ever growing blacker ; simulating a confidence which no one felt, talking over the details of the duty which they professed to have before them, of leading their men against the mutineers, to wipe out the stain which rested on the army ; half hoping that their particular regiments might prove an exception to the rule of treachery then paramount, half expecting to be shot down suddenly, unarmed and defenceless.

“ They have got a capital opportunity for polishing us off this evening, if they want to do so,” observed Spragge, cheerily, who with all other officers on leave had rejoined at the first tidings of the outbreak, as they sat down to mess-dinner on the first evening of his return ; “ half a-dozen of them could do the trick nicely, if they feel so

disposed ;” but the joke fell somewhat flat—this particular fate of a massacre while at the mess-table having already befallen the officers of another regiment down country ; the suggestion was considered ill-timed in the presence of the servants, who might understand what was said ; moreover the mess-orderly sepoy was standing in the veranda—and the dinner passed off without any further attempt at jests or badinage.

One morning, after more than a week had dragged itself out in this fashion, Yorke received orders to march to the Residency with two companies to strengthen the guard there. In the state of combined suspense and monotony which made up life at that time, a movement of any sort was an acceptable change. Everything being ready for marching, the detachment started half-an-hour after the order was received ; and Yorke, as he mounted his horse to follow it, was for the moment in good spirits, although he could not but be struck by the change in the European mode of life made in the last ten days as typified by the manner of his march. When last he set out for the Residency, the authorities had been careful to choose the cool of the evening for the



march. Now it was made in the full glare of a May sun at mid-day. And as he rode along in the rear of the detachment, and to windward of it to keep out of the dust made by the men's feet, it came upon him suddenly that he had been untrue to the memory of his love. During the last ten days his thoughts had scarcely once been occupied with the past; was this, he thought bitterly, to be the end of the great passion he had been hugging to his breast, and was it fear or excitement that had deadened his senses? But now as he drew near the house, his old feelings came up again. Yet no! not the same feelings. To cherish a common sort of love for the woman who could now never be his, would, he felt, be desecration. She must now be, it seemed to him, as a saint to be worshipped rather than a woman to be loved, and his heart bounded at the thought that he might now have the opportunity of proving his devotion in a way that could give no offence to the purest mind. Yet he did not even know if she were still at the Residency, or whether she had been sent away with the other ladies to a place of safety in the hills.

The detachment marched into the Residency

enclosure, and halted in the same place where Yorke had encamped before—the very spot of which, only three months ago, Olivia had made the pretty sketch, and when Yorke, standing by her while she plied her brush, had bewailed the monotony of military life, and its want of reality. No want of reality now, at any rate, and the only monotony that of suspense. Letting the detachment pile arms and break off, to take shelter under the trees which skirted the park wall, Yorke walked across the grounds to the house, under the portico of which divers scarlet-coated attendants were lounging as usual, and followed the man who went forward to announce him into the house. As he entered the large drawing-room, Mrs Falkland came out of a side room and advanced to meet him. It was just here that they parted the last time he saw her, when he went off, credulous young fool, burning with love and elate with hope, to be crushed to the earth presently with shame and despair. But three short months had passed, and now hope and love had been crushed together ;—and yet not love. Yorke felt in his heart that his love for the beautiful woman before him was as deep as ever ; but he felt also with honest pride

that it was love of a different kind ; that for the future devotion must be given without acknowledgment or return ; and, mingled with his anxiety at seeing her thus exposed to the threatening danger, was a feeling of elation that he might be near to share, perhaps even to shield her from it.

As Olivia came forward, Yorke noticed that she looked paler, and the rich colour and tasteful ornaments in which she had been wont to attire herself were replaced by a simple white muslin dress trimmed with a little blue ribbon, in keeping with the weather, but which made her, he thought, look taller and thinner. But he thought her also lovelier than ever.

Olivia blushed slightly, as she came forward and held out her hand. Did she at all guess what wild work she had made with his poor heart ? “ You have come with the troops, I suppose ? ” she said ; “ my husband is very anxious to see you ; will you step into his room ? ” And she led the way to Colonel Falkland’s office.

Falkland was writing at a table in his shirt-sleeves, for the heat was intense, and the punkah was not at work. Hot though it was, Yorke thought he would never have sat down in that

guise before Mrs Falkland, if she had been his wife. The colonel held out his hand to greet him, but without rising. He wanted Yorke and his detachment, he said, to strengthen the Residency guard. The greater part of the treasure had been sent into cantonments for the use of the field force about to march, but there were still about three lakhs of rupees—a considerable temptation to the roughs in the city, who were quite ready to rise on the smallest provocation, but would keep quiet so long as the troops on guard remained stanch, which they would probably do, so long as the main body at headquarters stuck by their colours. What did Yorke think about his own regiment?

Yorke said that they were well-conducted and steady enough so far, but he could not help admitting that a change had come over the manner of the sepoy, as in men who knew they were suspected, and deserved to be, after the treachery displayed at other places. Still, foolish though it might be, he could not help believing that they would prove an exception to the wholesale treachery everywhere manifested.

“Well, everything depends on General Slough; he has been sent down to take command, and

arrived in cantonments this morning. And yet not everything. A blockhead may easily precipitate matters, but a Hannibal could not keep the sepoy's from mutiny if they are bent on it. I am going down to cantonments presently to see what plans are determined upon, as soon as I can get my letter-writing done. This is the misfortune for us civilians," continued the colonel, looking wearily over his table covered with papers; "we have to be writing when we ought to be acting. I have been sitting here quill-driving ever since daybreak, and have not got through half the work yet. There are fifty things still to be done for the troops, and expresses to be sent in all directions."

"Cannot I act as your private secretary, sir?" asked Yorke; "I shall be only too happy to be of use."

"Thank you very much, my dear boy, but I think you should keep by the Treasury with your men just for the present. Here is my private secretary," he added, taking his wife's right hand, as she stood beside him, with his left, without looking up; and as Yorke quitted the room to join his detachment, he thought to himself that he could never have ventured to

make her his drudge, or to hold out a left hand in that way. With him she must always have been as one superior, to be treated like a queen ; and he could not but admit in his state of self-abasement that Falkland was the more fitting husband for such a bride. Yet what a honeymoon for her !

Passing out of the portico, Yorke met Captain Sparrow coming on foot towards the house, and they stopped to exchange a few words, standing on the brown surface, which at that season did duty for grass, in the full blaze of the midday sun. Sparrow was pale and anxious and excited, nor had the arrival of the detachment tended to reassure him. It was perfect madness of Falkland, he exclaimed, to send for more sepoys, and to think of holding the place by force, instead of giving up the Residency and falling back on cantonments. The troops were to march eastward that night, and then the city would rise, and they would all be murdered, as sure as fate. "He won't even agree," continued the captain, "to my giving up my own house and joining him in the Residency, lest it should seem to invite a rising ; and for the same reason he wouldn't send Mrs Falkland away. It's all very

well to show a bold front, but to my mind a few reasonable precautions would be better. I don't fancy being caught like a rat in a trap. All this pretence of confidence where you don't feel any seems simple infatuation. But it is no good remonstrating with him." And so saying, Sparrow passed on into the house.

The court-house, which Yorke had to guard—a long one-storeyed building with an arched veranda on each side, situated on the open plain a short distance beyond the Residency enclosure-wall—was not this day the scene of much business, the Commissioner being absent in the cantonments, and Captain Sparrow too busy, as he said, to attend, so that only the East-Indian assistant was present to conduct the Treasury routine; and the suitors who, having come out from the city, seemed disposed as they were there to make a day of it, sat squatting for the most part under the clumps of trees which surrounded the building, where also their ponies and the bullocks which had conveyed their carriages were tethered, discussing like the rest of the world the news of the day, momentous enough in itself, and not likely to have lost in importance from being retailed through the

country by word of mouth ; and Yorke fancied that they looked curiously at him as he passed by at the head of his men, as if wondering languidly how soon the latter would set on him.

As soon as the camel-borne tents came up, Yorke had them pitched under these trees ; and, having posted his sentries in the veranda of the rooms occupied by the treasure, he passed the day himself in the Commissioner's waiting-room. Society was still so far organised that punkah-pullers were obtained ; but it was symptomatic of the state of the times that the attendants had forgotten to lower the rush-blinds according to custom, so that the room swarmed with flies. At one o'clock his servant brought luncheon, cooked under a tree ; but the beer was almost as hot as the curry ; and flies, heat, and suspense combined, made eating almost impossible. Thus went the long day, Yorke ever and anon scanning the prospect from the veranda, looking through the trees towards the Residency to see if he could trace aught of what was happening to its inmates. It seemed impossible to realise the condition of affairs. Life all around was as quiet as ever. The sepoys not on guard lay undressed and asleep in their tents ; such of the



suitors as had remained were for the most part also asleep under the trees ; the different court-messengers were trying to get to sleep on the shady side of the veranda. Towards the Residency not a soul was stirring. Even the crows were overcome by the fierce afternoon heat, and sat still on the boughs with their beaks open, gasping for breath. And yet how enviable his position at present compared with that of so many of his countrymen, who, if still alive, were wandering outcasts over these burnt-up plains, struggling under the fierce heat to find some place of shelter ! And his turn was coming. Yet could it be that peaceful aspect was the forerunner of another such tragedy as had already occurred in other parts of India ? The events of the past three months—the races and balls and other small events which then made up the business of life—seemed already to have faded away into the distance like a dream. The monotonous peace of those times had been found fault with as dreary and dull ; how gladly would such dulness be welcomed back again in place of the dread expectancy of their present state ! And, thought the young man bitterly at times, am I not to be permitted to have even the

chance of dying like a man after striking a blow in self-defence—must it be my fate to wait here inactive till it is my turn to be shot down like a dog ? Then again to these despondent feelings would succeed a sensation almost of joy, as he recollected where he was, and that he had come back near to the presence of his old love ; could it be, after all, that their fates were bound together ?

## CHAPTER XIX.

At last the long hot day began to wear to an end; and towards evening Yorke saw Colonel Falkland's carriage drive up under the Residency portico, whence presently a messenger came to summon him.

He found the colonel standing on the gravel walk outside the house, apparently to avoid eavesdroppers, talking with Sparrow and Maxwell the doctor. He looked grave and anxious. "I am telling our friends here," he said, when Yorke came up to them, "the result of the council of war held in cantonments this afternoon. It was about as unsatisfactory as such councils always are. It is a thousand pities that Tartar was superseded. General Slough is an old woman. There were two straightforward courses to pursue. Either disarm the sepoys at once, boldly shooting them down if

they resisted ; or else take them with the field force, and show confidence in them. This would be the only chance of keeping them stanch. Old Slough has decided on a middle course, which will certainly fail, as all middle courses do. One regiment of native infantry is to be sent to Johtuck, nominally to guard the treasure there, in reality to get it out of the way ; another is to go to Meharunpoor for the same reason ; the third is to stay here. Of course the sepoys see through this ; in fact it is an invitation to them to mutiny and take themselves off. They march for their destinations to-night ; the Europeans march at two o'clock to-morrow morning, leaving the 80th N.I. behind ; and we have about twenty-four hours to prepare before the rising which will now certainly take place.

“ Well, now, to business. We at any rate must stick to our posts, and stand by the Nawab, who is really behaving very well under great temptation to do otherwise, to the last. I have arranged with the people in cantonments that this house shall be the rendezvous. Every house there is thatched ; and there is not a defensible hole or corner in the place. Brigadier

Polwheedle is there still, not being fit to travel, and his wife, Buxey the paymaster, and one or two other; and there will be the officers of the 80th, if they can get away. The Nawab has proposed that we should occupy his palace, which is a very strong place; but that is on the other side of the city, and the people from cantonments might never be able to reach it. This house is substantial, and stands well in the open; and if we have only time to get ready, we may be able to hold out here till relief comes. I should have wished to begin preparations ten days ago; but as long as there was a chance of saving things by keeping up appearances, I was bound to hold my hand. All that has been done so far is to store some food. A part has been brought in already, and the Nawab has a farther supply at my disposal.

"You might arrange, Maxwell, to bring in some medicines to-night. Take my cart, and fill it up with the needful things from the dispensary.

"I want you, Sparrow, to go to the palace at once with a message to the Nawab. No," he continued, noticing the expression on his assistant's face, "I think there is much less danger of

coming to grief if you ride through the city at night than if you go by day. Just step aside for a moment, and I will explain what has to be said.

"Now then," said the colonel, returning to where Yorke stood, after despatching his unwilling messenger, "let us arrange what has to be done to-morrow, for there is not a moment to be lost. It is unfortunate that we have no engineers here, to show us how the house might be retrenched; this is one of the occasions that come up in life to reproach us for past idleness and opportunities lost; and you, Yorke, I believe, did not go through Addiscombe; but I know you are a great military student. What are your ideas as to the best way of fortifying the Residency?"

"There couldn't be a better house in India for the purpose, sir. Have you any spare treasure-bags over at the Treasury?"

"Hundreds."

"Then let us have them filled with earth in the morning, and block up the verandas with sandbag walls; also the portico in the same way. The bushes in the garden near the house should be cut down, so as to destroy cover. The stables

are a long way off, but unless they are occupied, and loopholed on the other side, the enemy might collect to any amount behind them and in them. Occupying them, the Residency itself would not be exposed to fire on that side."

"True; and we should save the horses as long as we can—we may want them. Poor Kathleen, I should be sorry if she were to change hands without value received, and become the property of a general of rebels. But I think the stables are too far off to include in our scheme of defence."

"Well, then, sir, don't you think we ought to include Sparrow's house, at any rate? It is within easy musket-shot of your own, and would be very troublesome if occupied by an enemy; whereas, if we are in possession of it, there is open ground beyond, and we should in fact cover another front of our main fortress with a strong outpost."

"True; but think how this would weaken the garrison. And we don't even know yet whether we shall have a garrison. At best we shall not be more than a mere handful. No; I think we shall have quite enough to do with the main

building. Let us concentrate our resources on that."

There was some further discussion about the arrangements for the morrow, and then Yorke wished the colonel good-night, refusing his offer of dinner (it was now nine o'clock, and quite dark), although he would fain have taken another look at Olivia's anxious face; but, just as he was leaving, he turned back and said—

"Excuse the liberty, sir, but is it too late even now to send Mrs Falkland to some place of safety?"

"Some place of safety! Where is such a spot to be found? I know of only one—the centre of the European force which is to march from cantonments to-night. But my wife could not ask for a privilege denied to the other ladies. Besides, the troops will have enough to do by themselves, without being encumbered with women and children."

"I feel sorry," added the young man, with some hesitation, "that you did not send her to the hills with the escort that went a few days ago."

"Yes," replied Falkland, slowly, and looking down on the ground; "I suppose a man seldom



has his duty put before him in such form as to require him to sacrifice what is dearer to him than his own life. It seems both careless and selfish to have kept her here, does it not? But it looked at one time as if everything would depend on our showing a bold front in every direction; and if the Commissioner had manifested want of confidence by sending his wife away, he might have turned the balance. At least so it seemed to me at the time. Poor child!" he added, as if speaking to himself, "she is hardly conscious of her heroism, or what it has cost her husband to allow her to practise it. Had I known that the people in cantonments would be such fatuous blockheads, I might have acted differently. But it is useless to indulge in regrets. There is nothing to be done but to keep up a bold front to await the crash as best we may."

"Then do you think, sir, that it is quite certain the rest of the army will follow suit and go?"

"I do; all the supposed safeguards have failed us so far. Hindoos and Mohammedans have not shown the jealousy of each other that was expected; and the native officers, who had the

strongest inducements to be faithful, seem to be taking the lead everywhere. And although several regiments are holding back for a time, not one has shown a distinct sign of standing by us, or displaying an active part against the mutineers. I expect we shall have the whole army on us sooner or later, although it may be by degrees."

"Then what chance have we against such numbers with our handful of Europeans?"

"Not much, apparently. But a good deal may be hoped for from luck, and the blunders the villains may be trusted to make. Already they have made a great mistake in not rising at the same time everywhere. Of course, my dear boy," continued the colonel, laying his hand on Yorke's shoulder, "you will not repeat what I say. I speak plainly to you because I see you are the sort of man to be trusted."

On returning to his little camp by the court-house, Yorke found a note from Spragge awaiting him, brought by a servant who had come out from cantonments with the rest of his things. "We are just starting for Johtuck," said the writer. "The old women who command here have not got the pluck to take us with them, or

to disarm us, but send us away because they funk keeping us with the force. Of course the men see through the dodge, and there is a change come over them already. They look as sulky as fiends. If our dear old colonel had been with us still, we might have had a chance; but poor Dumble has gone quite foolish, and is about as fit to have charge of the regiment as a hospital nurse would be; and we shall have a flare-up before long, and no mistake. I write in an awful hurry. Good-bye, old fellow, and better luck to you than we are likely to have."

Just as Yorke had finished reading the note, the senior native officer of the detachment came up to make his report for the night; the old man's manner was quiet and respectful, as usual, and conveyed no impression that anything was wrong. Dismissing him, Yorke threw off his shell-jacket, and, lying down on the little cot which had been placed in front of the tent, watched the scene before him. A few yards in advance of his own tent was the little line of sepoy's tents, but the men were mostly sleeping outside, to get what air was to be had; a few were sitting in groups, passing the pipe round

and talking. In advance was the guard-tent, with two sentries pacing up and down before it. Watching the peaceful scene, and wondering whether it was really to be the precursor of a life's crisis, the young man fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE next day was a busy one. From before dawn a gang of coolies, working under orders of the Commissioner's jemadar, were engaged in filling the bags brought from the adjacent Treasury, with earth obtained from a shallow trench dug in the lawn, while water-carts were employed to loosen the hard-baked soil; another party were cutting down the shrubs and bushes in the garden, and an army of tailors from the bazaar were squatting on the veranda floor, sewing bags to supplement the supply already available. Soon the space between the veranda pillars began to be blocked up with the first courses of a strong barrier designed to be seven feet high, loop-holed and bullet-proof. "You see, my friend," said Yorke, in Hindustani, to the native officer whom he had brought with him, nominally to superintend the operation—"if the roughs

in the city rise, the court-house would be a difficult position to hold against a mob, even with my gallant sepoy. So we will retire with the treasure into this post until the regiments from cantonments march to our help." The old soobahdar raised his hand to his cap, and observed, gravely, that the European gentlemen were famous for their skill in military science; and Yorke did not care to pursue the conversation.

While they were thus engaged Falkland and Sparrow rode up, with half-a-dozen mounted orderlies behind them, returning from a ride through the city.

"We have been upholding British rule, you see, as long as it lasts;" said Falkland, dismounting; "but the roughs are beginning to show their teeth, are they not, Sparrow? and, what is worse, there were some sepoy's in the bazaar, out of uniform, whose manner was most insolent. However, I think we read them a lesson this once, if it was the last time—didn't we, Sparrow?" he added, smiling; and indeed, from the expression on that gentleman's countenance, it seemed as if the morning ride had certainly been exciting.

Yorke longed to ask some question about

Olivia, when just then she appeared in the veranda, and invited them to come inside and take some tea. The room into which they followed her, now cut off from the outside air, was hot and stuffy, and filled with the dust thrown up by the work going on outside; the punkah-puller, dispossessed of his usual post in the veranda, was squatting in the room; the servants were moving the furniture, and, among the general disorder, Olivia, dressed in a light morning robe, seemed alone to retain the calm and orderly appearance of other days. Yorke noticed the expression of anxiety that overcame Falkland's face as he looked at his wife; but she seemed determined to express no fear, and, as they drank their tea, every one avoided the subject which was uppermost in their thoughts. As for Yorke, he felt quite angry with himself as he returned to his work, at finding how small a place was now occupied in his mind by the luxury of grief.

The Commissioner made a show of doing business in the court-house in the afternoon—driving over as usual for form's sake in his carriage, although the distance was but a few yards. "I hear," said he, taking Yorke aside, before going into court, and after he had spoken a few words

of exhortation to the native officers and the guard, "and the information seems reliable, that the regiment left behind in cantonments last night, the 80th, will certainly rise, although the time is not fixed : they are in communication with your regiment and the other one which has marched away. My police in the city are utterly rotten and ready to join. The Nawab, who is behaving admirably, notwithstanding strong pressure put on him from the other side, may be able to keep the city quiet with his people ; but I doubt it. I have about twenty men I can depend on altogether. But on the other hand, a note has just been brought by a runner, from across the river, to say that they are keeping things square over there, and that a Sikh regiment is under orders for this ; it may be here in a week. Meantime I hope we shall be able to hold the Residency. Everything depends on whether the sepoy attack us or march off for Delhi."

Another weary day was passed by Yorke in the court-house, marked only by heat and suspense, and which seemed as if it would never come to an end. Towards evening a Residency servant came over with refreshments and ice



sent by Olivia, and brought a note in pencil from Falkland. "The rising is fixed for to-night. I have this from two quarters. Be on your guard. Your men will certainly join. Do nothing to precipitate it; but whenever your men declare themselves, and you can do no good by stopping, make your way over here as fast as you can."

So then the supreme moment was come at last; was it to be his fate to be shot down unresisting, as so many others had been already? or might he have the bitter happiness of at least making a fight for it, and dying in defence of his idol, like a gallant soldier? "What a fool I was," he thought, "never to have bought a revolver while I had the chance!"

Thus musing, and in a state of highly-wrought expectancy, the young man sat in the waiting-room of the court-house, sipping his iced water to keep down the choking sensation in his throat, and making believe to eat the dinner which his servant had placed before him. Then, as it grew dark, he put on his sword, and mustered the men for evening roll-call, inspected the guard, and went the round of the sentries. There was nothing in the manner of the sepoys to indicate

that any movement was intended ; but he noticed that, on going off duty, they did not strip to their waist-cloths, as would have been usual, but dressed themselves in their light tunics, and that they wore turbans instead of their ordinary cotton skull-caps. This looked bad ; but it seemed useless to say anything.

By-and-by Yorke lay down on his bed before the tent—this time, however, fully dressed—and as he looked around him, the unlovely baked-up landscape, lighted up by the young moon, seemed to have new charms. Was he looking on it for the last time ?

With his head on the pillow, he could watch the men, and he observed that, although quite quiet, none of them lay down to sleep ; nor did they appear to be smoking, but sat talking in little groups in a low tone.

But nature will assert itself, even when a man is expecting death ; and while thus lying, and, as he thought, on the alert, Yorke fell into a doze, from which he was suddenly awoke by the sound of a cannon.

Was it the morning gun in cantonments, four miles off ?

It was the cantonment gun, but not the morn-

ing gun ; it was the gun at midnight—the signal for the outbreak.

Yorke started to his feet.

The sepoys, too, sprang to seize the muskets piled before their tents, and began to fall in. Yorke advanced towards them, for it was light enough to see what had happened, calling out in Hindustani, “What are you doing, sepoys ? Are you mad, to behave like this ?”

There was a stir among them, and several muskets were pointed at him ; but while the old soobahdar stood irresolute, others ran forward and surrounded him. At first he thought they meant to kill him, but their movement was really to protect him from the rest.

“There will be no harm done you,” said they ; “but it is of no use to resist.” And hardly understanding how it came about, Yorke found himself half led, half hustled, into the Residency park, when the men suddenly left him standing alone, and returned to their fellows.

So then the crisis was over ; and he had done his duty, and yet got off with his life—thus far faring better than many a comrade in the like case.

Just then he was startled by a man coming

up to him out of the darkness, who turned out to be one of the Residency servants, who had been watching the affair, and told him he would find the Commissioner at the house.

Falkland was standing on the steps of the portico, with Sparrow, Maxwell, the jemadar, and some half-dozen servants armed with muskets.

"So," said Falkland, grasping his hand warmly, as Yorke explained briefly what had happened, "my information has turned out true. The scoundrels have behaved well so far in letting you off without injury, and it looks as if they meant to go away quietly."

"What is the next thing to be done?" asked Yorke.

"Nothing but to wait upon events. If the sepoys march upon the city and us, we have only to sell ourselves as dearly as possible; there are four of us behind a breastwork, and I think I can depend on these good fellows"—pointing to the servants who stood in the portico; "but if they go off, as I expect they will, we may yet be able to keep order in the city. The fugitives from cantonments will be here shortly, if they have succeeded in getting away. But do you

go inside for a moment ; you will find some one there very rejoiced to see you."

In the dining-room, dimly lighted by a single lamp, Yorke found Mrs Falkland standing alone. "Oh, my friend !" she exclaimed, advancing and holding out both hands to greet him ; "so you are safe. We have passed a dreadful time here, knowing the danger you were in, and so close to us all the time ; but my husband said nothing could be done to help you, but that you must be left to face it alone. Oh ! if only the others can be saved in the same way !" There was a smile on her face, pale and anxious though it looked ; and to Yorke, returning to join the others outside, it seemed, as he felt that her greeting was warmer than would have been earned by a lifetime of ordinary neighbourhood, that even the mutiny was not without its compensation.

Everything was still and quiet within the park.

Falkland and Yorke went out to reconnoitre.

Advancing across the lawn, and looking over the park wall towards the court-house, they could hear men's voices in the still night.

"It is your men looting the Treasury," said

Falkland ; " they evidently mean to go off with the money. So far good."

And indeed, in a few minutes, the detachment marched past them, along the road outside the wall, so close that they could distinguish the old native officer marching at the head of the column. In the middle was a cart, laden no doubt with the plunder. They were evidently marching to join the mutineers in cantonments.

" If they take the road," whispered the colonel, " they will meet the fugitives from cantonments, and not let them off so cheaply as they did you. I have got some of the Nawab's horsemen patrolling the road, but they are not to be depended on. Ride after them, Yorke ; Kathleen is ready saddled in the stable hard by. See which way they go. If they go by the road you can head them and warn all the fugitives you meet to turn aside till they are past. But probably the rogues will take a short cut across the plain to the native lines."

Yorke did as he was bid, and rode after the sepoys, keeping a little way behind them, and off the hard road, so that they might not hear the horse's steps. In a short time he came back to the Residency, whither Falkland had now

returned, announcing that the men had turned off the road as he expected, and made straight for the native part of the cantonments. So far well; the fugitives coming up the road would not be molested.

Presently the night was lighted up by a bright glare, increasing every minute. The bungalows in cantonments and the deserted barracks were being fired. Soon it became almost as light as day, although the fires were four miles off, and from the roof of the house the blaze could be seen high above the trees, as one after another the great thatched buildings shot into flames.

Still everything remained quiet about the Residency. One or two of the small party patrolled the building; the armed attendants sat on the portico steps; Olivia on the roof watched, awestruck, the conflagration. Then the stillness of the night was broken by the sound of wheels, and a carriage driven at full gallop entered through the gates, and came up the avenue to the outside of the portico, ingress underneath being prevented by the sandbag barrier.

It was the brigadier's carriage; the old gentleman was helped out by Mrs Polwheedle, and

came limping up the steps. Sundry boxes also were handed up.

"Oh, Colonel Falkland!" gasped the lady, "the life we have been leading since the European troops went away. I don't think I could have stood another day of it; and the servants so impudent too. I'll pay them out, the rascals, if ever I get a chance. I thought we never should have escaped; and when the gun fired, the brigadier wanted to mount his horse and go down to the native lines, but I would not hear of it. It was his duty, he said, to go and see what he could do to stop the outbreak. He was on the sick list, and must obey my orders, I said. Duty, indeed! to go and get shot by those infernal blackguards, and with the carriage all ready too. So here we are. We were attacked on the road by a couple of horsemen; but I held out a pistol at them, and they sheered off, just as they were coming down on us."

"It is just as well you did not fire," said Falkland, "for I suspect they were some orderlies of mine sent out to patrol the road, and warn you if there was danger ahead."

Soon other fugitives arrived in haste and flurry; Captain Buxey in his buggy, Major and



Mrs Peart and their daughter in a carriage, the bazaar-sergeant's East Indian wife with a couple of children, a Mustaphabad shopkeeper, and later on several officers of the 80th on horseback. There had been no regular attack on the European residents; on the signal-gun being fired, the sepoy of the 80th (the regiment left at Mustaphabad) had turned out and formed on parade, a few of them only leaving the ranks and opening a desultory fusilade towards their front into the darkness. The officers of the regiment, whose horses were ready saddled, had hastened down to the lines from their respective bungalows; but being received with threats and this dropping fire, had turned and ridden slowly off to the Residency, whither the other residents had already, at the sound of the firing, made their way.

All the Europeans known to be at the station were now accounted for, except the colonel of the 80th and the bazaar-sergeant. Some of the officers thought they had seen the former in the darkness making for the parade, but had lost sight of him. The bazaar-sergeant, as his wife related, had sent her and the children off in his pony-carriage, and said he would go down and try to keep things straight in the bazaar.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE night wore on, the glare from the burning cantonments growing ever brighter, till the rays of coming dawn mingled with it. The ladies sat or stood in the drawing-room, or went on the roof to watch the conflagration, finding even at such a time a sort of pleasure in discussing the particulars of their flight, and comparing notes on the property they had brought away ; while of the men some, organised in a little company, patrolled the park, and some rode down the road towards cantonments to see if they could get any tidings of the two missing fugitives.

At last the day arrived to throw its light on the strange-looking group which had escaped the shipwreck of the night—the pallid, dishevelled ladies, the bundles of clothing littering the well-ordered room ; outside an equal contrast between the peaceful aspect of the grounds and

the condition of the house itself, with the verandas blocked up with sand-bags, and covered with dust and earth, the hasty trenches dug round it, and the tools scattered about, left by the workmen overnight on the scene of their unfinished task.

Soon as the daylight became stronger a strange thing was discerned—a party of sepoy's mounting guard over the tents still left standing by the court-house ; and to Yorke advancing to discover what this meant, a corporal came down the road to salute and explain matters. There had been a split in the camp, it appeared, and this little party of seventeen men in all had parted with their comrades, and come back to be true to their salt. The detachment, in their hurry to be off, had left their tents standing, and Yorke's, with all his little property, was untouched, and his horse was still standing picketed under a tree. Yet the men, as Yorke went up to greet and praise them, did not seem very proud of their behaviour, and their manner was as if they rather looked to be suspected. A few spirited words from Falkland, however, who had come down on hearing the news, seemed to put them more at their ease. He told Yorke to move them up to

the Residency. "Let us show perfect confidence in them," he said, "for they deserve it."

"Good gracious! you are surely not going to let those villains come here!" cried Mrs Polwheedle, as from the portico steps she saw the little party marching up with Yorke at their head. "Stuff and nonsense about loyalty. Loyalty, indeed! Don't talk to me about loyalty," she continued, as Colonel Falkland explained the circumstances; "it's a mere trap for springing upon us and murdering us when we are not expecting it. I am as sure of it as that my name is Martha Polwheedle. The brigadier mustn't allow it. Where is Polwheedle?" And while the lady bustled away in search of her husband, who was trying to recover his dazed senses by pouring water on his head in an adjacent room, Falkland established the sepoy as main guard in the portico, placing Major Peart in command of it, and detaching a couple of sentries to the court-house.

Meanwhile the business of the day was ushered in by the servants bringing tea for the party, just as if nothing had happened, and Falkland set to work to organise matters. While some of the officers were attached to the

guard, a part of them rode with him, attended by the half-dozen of the Nawab's horsemen whom he still retained about him, through the city, which so far remained quiet; and Falkland had notices posted up inviting all able-bodied men to come forward and enrol themselves in a levy he meant to raise forthwith, and they paid a visit to the Nawab at his palace. "A curious state of things we have arrived at," he said on his return to Yorke, who had been left in charge of the working parties; "to be dependent for our lives on the man whom we have dethroned, and who has most reason to hate us. The Nawab has only to hold up his hand, and all the scum of the city would rise in an instant, and there would be a speedy end of the business as far as we are concerned. It must be a strong temptation to the poor little man to take his revenge, but I think he believes in our eventual success; at any rate his minister does, and is prepared to be stanch. But there is a strong opposition party in the palace headed by his brother, who is in active communication with the mutineers; so we cannot answer for the result of an hour. However, every hour gained is something. It is well I sent the detachment

of his troops away except these half-dozen ; they would certainly have fraternised with the mutineers if they had stopped at the Residency."

While the rest of the party were thus engaged, Egan and M'Intyre of the 80th rode down to cantonments to see how things looked there, returning in a couple of hours with their report. Every house in the place was in ruins, nothing remaining but the charred walls, while the gardens were strewn with papers and rubbish not worth carrying off. There was not a sepoy to be seen, but pillagers were wandering about in every direction, camp-followers from the bazaar or people from the surrounding villages, and the place where they had all lived in more complete security than could be found in any other part of the world was now the scene of utter anarchy. Riding round to the bazaar at the back of the station, they found things there were just as bad, the place full of people—armed, some apparently for self-protection, others wandering about in search of plunder. As soon as they were perceived they were received with howls and execrations ; and in attempting to push their way towards the police-station they were fired upon down the street, the shots coming

apparently from that building, and they were forced to retire. Returning back by way of the deserted native lines, they came upon the body of the colonel of the 80th, lying stiff and stark on the parade, just as he must have fallen the night before, his glazed eyes staring upwards at the blazing sun. No help could be got for removing the corpse, and again the plunderers, seeing the young men halted, began to collect in a threatening way, and the latter were fain to ride away, leaving it there to be devoured by the village dogs and jackals.

Within the house the ladies, unable to realise the situation, or to settle down to it, spent the long day in disjointed talk, the most active lively part being taken by Mrs Polwheedle, whose indignation sustained her while others were anxious and depressed, and who recounted more than once to the listeners her experiences of the last few days. "Brigadier," I said to Polwheedle, "as sure as my name is Martha Polwheedle, these villains will rise suddenly and murder us all, unless you are beforehand with them ; retire with the Europeans and take up a position. That is the thing to do as a brigadier and a military man ; retire, and take up a posi-

tion. But the brigadier wouldn't do anything, and my words have come true, sure enough."

"You don't understand these things, my dear," said the gentleman referred to, who lay on a couch with a basin of water beside him, in which he was dipping a handkerchief, and applying it to his forehead—"you don't understand these things, my dear. It was not a purely military question; there were other considerations besides. I am sure I did everything for the best," added the poor gentleman, dabbing the wet cloth with energy on his temples.

"Considerations indeed!" replied the lady; "much consideration the villains showed us. I know if I hadn't insisted upon having the carriage kept ready, for all you said about showing confidence and not making preparations, we should have been murdered in our beds; and if I hadn't seen to having a few things packed up and put into it beforehand, you wouldn't have a clean shirt to your back, any more than Major Peart there, who has only got what he stands in. However, here comes tiffin; it's well the Commissioner's servants have not run away as well as all the rest." And indeed an array of attendants now entered to make preparations for the



mid-day meal, pretty much as if nothing had happened save that their attire wanted the usual accompaniments of waistbands and turbans, and was otherwise somewhat slovenly. But the Commissioner was absent in the city ; and Olivia, as she invited her guests to seat themselves at table, was too distraught with anxiety to notice the omission.

Towards evening, when Falkland returned home from a second excursion with his party, hot and dusty, he was able to report that things still looked quiet. The Nawab's guards were doing their duty ; some of the runaway police had returned to their posts ; and the fresh levy he had raised amounted to about two hundred men, many of them the biggest scoundrels in the place, but there were not arms for more than a few of them at present to do any mischief with, and by the promise of high pay they might be kept out of mischief for a time. The worst thing was that there was no news of relief coming, or indeed news of any kind from any quarter. It looked as if the whole country was up, for messengers must certainly have been despatched from the settled districts.

The gentlemen partook of a scrambling meal,

and then the watch was set for the night. The ladies were accommodated in Olivia's rooms; the gentlemen not on duty slept on the gravel paths outside the portico, for the heat inside the house was stifling, the sandbag wall round the veranda—now almost completed—stopping all ingress of air. Yorke's turn of watch was from eight to midnight; when relieved he lay down on a vacant cot and was soon fast asleep, tired out with the excitement and want of rest of the last forty-eight hours.

It was just dawn when he was awakened by the tramp of horses and sound of voices, and he jumped up, thinking that an attack was being made, but soon recognised his friend Spragge, who was sitting on his pony close to his bed, with other officers of the 76th, recounting their escape to their friends on watch. The regiment had reached Johtuck, thirty miles from Mustaphabad, by a forced march, on the morning after they started; and the next day was passed quietly in camp outside the town. The following night—the same in which the outbreak occurred at the latter place—they were suddenly aroused, as they lay on their beds outside their tents, by the crack of musketry and the whizzing of bul-

lets. Some sepoy, clustered in little groups by their own tents, were deliberately firing at their officers from a distance of about thirty yards. The latter at once made for their horses, which were standing ready saddled in the rear. "Some of the grooms had bolted," said Jerry; "and small blame to them, for they were getting what was meant for us; but my fellow held on to my tat, which was plunging and backing from the noise, like a man, which, considering the many lickings the poor beggar had had, was very creditable to him. I gave him ten rupees as soon as I could get on the pony's back, which was half of all the money I had, and told him to fish for himself as best he could, and then I began to make tracks after the others; and I think we should all have begun to skedaddle, when Braddon calls out, 'Steady, boys—there's no hurry; let us retire slowly to the right flank, not too close together, but keeping each other in view;' and so we were riding off at a foot-pace, when little Raugh calls out, 'My pony's shot!' 'Catch hold of my stirrup, Johnny,' says Braddon, turning round, 'and then I'll give you a lift as soon as we are out of this.' 'Holloa!' says Braddon, presently, 'here's the major in difficulties;' and sure enough there

was old Dumble's horse turning round and round, frightened at the bullets, I suppose; the groom had bolted, and the poor old major was trying in vain to get his foot into the stirrup: and in about half a minute the horse had got loose and was galloping off into space. 'We mustn't desert our commanding officer,' says Braddon to me. 'Look here, Jerry; just bear a hand, and I'll give the poor old chap a lift in my dog-cart.' So he jumps off his horse as cool as a cucumber, tells Johnny to mount it and be off, and puts his mare, which was standing picketed there with her harness on, into the dog-cart. I had to help a bit, you know, for the mare was precious fidgety—as well she might be—for the bullets were coming in pretty thick, I can tell you. Why those brutes of sepoy didn't come up and finish us off, I am sure I can't tell; but no, the cowardly beggars stood by their own tents, potting away, missing us over and over again at thirty yards. Perhaps they didn't want to hit us after all, but only to frighten us—at any rate, we all got off scot-free. But will you believe it, the poor old major could hardly get into the dog-cart when it *was* ready; there was Braddon at the reins, talking to the mare as she jumped about, and saying,

‘Now then, major—damn it, major, do please make a spring,—there is really no time to be lost;’ and there was the old major, bobbing up and down, and always jumping short. It was the richest thing you ever saw; I should have been ready to die with laughing if I hadn’t been in such a precious funk. At last I gave the major a hoist, and he just managed to get into the back seat of the cart—enough to lift the mare off her feet almost—Braddon jumped up in front, and I mounted my pony again, and away we all came, and not a soul of us touched. We should have been here yesterday, but early in the morning we saw some horsemen in the distance who looked very like irregular cavalry, so we took shelter for the day in a village. The people were civil enough—perhaps because we were a good-sized party, and well armed; and we got flour and milk, and food for our horses. Braddon wouldn’t let a single villager leave the place during the day lest they should convey intelligence of our being there, and at night we came away.

“Braddon gave all the orders, for the major was regularly scared, and poor old Passey was quite knocked up with the heat and the march-

ing. Twice that blessed dog-cart got upset in the dark, going across country, and once we came to a water-course, and had to go several miles out of our way to find a place to cross. Such a scene as the country was, too; the villagers up everywhere, and apparently having out all the quarrels of the last hundred years. Fires and firing in every direction. At last, steering by the stars, we came in upon the trunk road, and then it was all plain sailing, and we could push on. We passed through the cantonments, which were silent and deserted—it seemed so strange to be riding in this way past our own houses, and I should have liked to look in at our shop and see that the thieves had left a clean shirt or two, but Braddon would not allow of any loitering, and the moonlight showed plainly enough that all the bungalows had been fired. So here we are, Arty, my boy, safe and sound the whole of us; I have got just ten dibs in my pocket, and not a rag to my name but what I am standing in. I say, by Jove, what fools we were not to invest in revolvers while we had the chance! I wonder if it's possible to get anything to drink."

The coming of the fugitives caused quite a

revival of good spirits. The ladies came out with greetings at their escape, and busied themselves with serving out tea and food to the wearied travellers, and Yorke and the others who still possessed wardrobes supplied them with a change of raiment, while the Commissioner's washermen were put in requisition to rehabilitate their own; and leaving the new arrivals to rest themselves, a part of the others set out to patrol the city. But there was a revulsion of feeling, when later in the morning two officers of the 82d, the third of the three regiments which had garrisoned Mustaphabad, and which had been detached to Meharunpoor, rode up, faint and weary, to the Residency. Their story was nearly the same as that of the officers of the 76th. Their men had arisen almost at the same time, but the officers had not been so fortunate. Two at least were seen to fall before they could mount their horses; the others, riding away into the night, got separated, and never came together again. These two only found their way to the rendezvous; the remainder, although looked for all day anxiously, were never again seen by their fellow-countrymen; whether shot by their own sepoy, or murdered

afterwards by village marauders, their bodies lay somewhere festering in the sun, among the numerous victims of the times whose precise fate was never ascertained, denied even the rude and speedy funeral rites of death on the battle-field.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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